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**Cosmopolitan Expertise: Music, Media  
and Cultural Identities in Italy**

**by  
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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## **Declaration**

I declare that the contents of this thesis are my own work and that no material contained in this thesis has been submitted for a degree at another university.

The following articles have been submitted during the period of study for this PhD:

‘Bourdieu and the sociology of cultural evaluation: lessons from Italian popular music journalism’, Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia (peer-reviewed journal article; accepted, forthcoming).

“Cultura di classe in pillole”: il folk revival e le pratiche del giornalismo musicale italiano’. In F. Fabbri and G. Plastino (eds.). Il folk music revival in Italia. Milan: Il Saggiatore (book chapter; forthcoming).

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*A culture that bonds and divides: Bourdieu after the cultural turn*, 5th April 2013. ‘Engaging Sociology’, BSA Annual Conference, Grand Connaught Rooms, London, UK.

*Reflexivity or illusio? Bourdieu and the study of the aesthetic public sphere*, 22nd February 2013. ‘Uses, misuses, and non-uses of Pierre Bourdieu in social research’, University of Bologna, Italy.

*Personal or political? Consuming music magazines in 1970s Italy*, 24th November 2012. 'BASTA! Patterns of Protest in Modern Italy: History, Agents and Representation', ASMI Annual Conference, University of London, UK.

*Artistic value as valuable resource: strategies of differentiation in the field of Italian popular music journalism*, 8th November 2012. 'Recognition and Consecration in the Arts', University of Poitiers, France.

*Political engagement as symbolic autonomy: the Italian music press and the borders of a 'field in the making'*, 7th September 2012. 'Artistic Practices', ESA network 'Sociology of Arts', University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna, Austria; and 12th April 2012. 'Sociology in an Age of Austerity', BSA Annual Conference, University of Leeds, UK.

*Music, journalism, and the study of cultural change*, 23rd February 2012. 'East Asia and Globalisation in Comparison', Chung-Ang University, Seoul, South Korea.

*Italian music magazines between cultural mediation and political activism: the case of Muzak*, 24th June 2011. 'LitPop - Popular Music and Writing', Northumbria University, UK.

*Music journalists as political intermediaries: methodological challenges in studying 1970s Italian music magazines*, 22nd June 2011. SIS Postgraduate Colloquium, University of Exeter, UK; and 15th June 2011. ASMI Postgraduate Conference, University of Bristol, UK.

## Abstract

My thesis explores the extent to which people's nationality informs their engagement with popular culture and strategies of social distinction (Bourdieu 1984). I address this question by studying the emergence of popular music criticism as a new cultural sector in Italy, and more specifically the practices of critics working during the 1970s. Drawing on Bourdieu's field theory (1996), and combining archival research, social history and discourse analysis, the thesis explores the different dimensions of criticism as a social practice. On the one hand, it analyses the social biography of critics and the boundaries of music criticism as a cultural field; especially as regards class, gender and place. On the other hand, it studies the way critics evaluated different forms of Anglo-American popular music – such as rock, jazz and soul – and how their aesthetic claims and distinctions were received by their audience. The thesis argues that the social trajectory of critics shaped the way they distinguished themselves from national culture and, as a result, their *cosmopolitan critique* of Italian cultural and political institutions. Furthermore, the thesis argues that the social diversity of critics' audience, and their active contestation of critics' claims, made the music press a space for reflexivity about the inequalities shaping both the field and Italian youth culture.

From a theoretical point of view, the thesis expands Bourdieu's field theory taking into account: a) the effects of global forces on the construction of national cultural fields; b) the impact of aesthetic experiences on the habitus (Bourdieu 1984) and practices of cultural producers; c) the forms of reflexivity and critique enabled by specific fields of practice. The thesis provides an original contribution to the study of media, music cultures, taste and cultural production.

## Introduction

### **Thesis summary and research questions**

This work has been informed by a longstanding interest in culture as a means of both exclusion and inclusion, and by a fascination for the ways in which music shapes the dynamics of cultural membership. As I will discuss in Chapters 1 and 2, these are barely new questions for sociology and cultural studies. However, such questions have been explored mostly in relation to cultural consumption and production, while as regards music studies, they have been explored mostly in relation to American and British popular music cultures. This thesis addresses a different field of practice, one that is relatively young from a historical point of view (Lopes 2002, Lindberg et al. 2005): popular music criticism. Further, the thesis focuses on criticism as a *national* cultural field that is shaped by the practices and asymmetries of power of a *global* cultural industry. On the one hand, it explores how such a position shapes critics' views and the way they make sense of their work. On the other hand, it analyses the reception of 'non-national' (e.g. American and British) musical traditions, the meanings they have acquired in the Italian context, and the practices of social distinction (Bourdieu 1984) they have enabled. Such issues, and more generally the impact of globalisation on both cultural production and consumption, have been addressed only recently by sociologists (e.g. Regev 2007, Dowd and Janssen 2011, Purhonen and Wright 2013).<sup>1</sup> Although these questions can be explored by studying music consumers and fans as well, critics open up further possibilities for researching cultural membership, social distinction and the way national differences shape such processes. As I will discuss in Chapter 1, critics deal with the making of symbolic

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<sup>1</sup> However, globalisation has been a longstanding concern for theorists reflecting on the systemic features of cultural industries. See Banks (2007: 125-155) for a discussion of such approaches.

boundaries on a regular (that is, institutional) basis. Such boundaries are defined by aesthetics – e.g. differences between music genres – but also by society. Indeed, critics define differences between ‘the people’ consuming (or producing) different kinds of music. Moreover, they regularly discuss and justify such classifications. They address both the content of cultural classifications – what music? what people? – and *why* they are important. Studying critics, then, makes it possible to explore in detail the *cultural logics* of social distinction, and how critics' position within a national periphery of the global recording industry may inform such dynamics. In this respect, the thesis joins a recent body of work addressing the *cultural frames* constructed by critics and other media experts; frames which circulate among a broader (though mostly middle class) audience (Baumann and Johnston 2007, Binder and Cheyne 2010). However, it broadens the focus of such studies by taking into account the social and historical genesis of popular music criticism; the diversity of organisations and practices through which critics intervene in the cultural arena; and the reception of criticism, that is, the way in which critics' evaluations are received (and sometimes questioned) by audiences. In this respect, the thesis has been driven by the following research questions, which address four different dimensions of criticism as a social practice:

### **1) The social and historical genesis of Italian popular music criticism**

Which social, economic and political transformations enhanced the emergence of popular music criticism in Italy? To what extent is the music press shaped by social boundaries (e.g. class, gender, age, geographical location)? What is the social trajectory of critics and their audience?

## **2) The impact of global and national structures on the practices of critics**

In what ways do critics make sense of their social role vis-à-vis the larger national and global context? In what ways do they claim the social relevance of popular music criticism? In relation to what fields, institutions and actors do they define their own space of practice and their positions? How they situate themselves in relation to economic and political institutions?

## **3) The reception and evaluation of non-national music genres**

How do critics' national position and institutional affiliation shape the way they evaluate non-national music genres? How do they make sense of differences between high and popular culture? Are such differences meaningful to them? To what extent does music's aesthetic and social properties (e.g. musicians' gender and ethnicity) shape the evaluations of critics?

## **4) The reception of popular music criticism**

How do audiences receive the evaluations and distinctions proposed by critics? To what extent do they challenge critics' claims of cultural authority? How do critics justify their choices to their readers? To what extent do social differences and inequalities (class, gender, age, geographical location) shape the reception of criticism?

These questions will be empirically addressed by the thesis' data chapters. The first two questions, dealing with the historical emergence and social construction of popular music criticism, are addressed by Chapters 5 and 6. The last two chapters focus on more specific practices. Chapter 7 explores critics' evaluation of different

American and British music genres. Chapter 8 analyses both the letters that readers sent regularly to Italian music magazines and the way in which they were mediated by critics, thus exploring how the audience received and discussed the positions of critics, but also how critics themselves addressed the concerns of readers.

### **Theoretical rationale and contribution**

Drawing on Bourdieu's field theory, the thesis assumes a historical and genealogical perspective on the aforementioned questions (which is fully discussed in Chapters 3 and 4), which is why it focuses on 1970s Italy, rather than on contemporary music criticism. Indeed, this historical frame makes it possible to study the emergence of a new cultural field, and thus the emergence of (and struggle over) new cultural practices, particularly new classifications and forms of social distinctions. Following Bourdieu (1996) and, to a lesser extent, Elias (1987), I adopt a historical perspective in order to better understand contemporary cultural practices and their socio-historical genesis. Further, as I will argue in Chapter 3, studying a cultural field 'in the making' (Ferguson 1998) the thesis contributes to a better understanding of some general properties of cultural fields that existing studies have addressed only occasionally, and that Bourdieu himself did not define as constitutive dimensions of fields.

First of all, the thesis argues that critics' national position, and the way they experienced global cultural changes, informed their engagement with music and their practices of distinction. As I will argue in Chapters 5 and 6, the 'doxa' (Bourdieu 1996) and symbolic boundaries of 1970s popular music criticism were shaped by a very distinctive experience of the national, one depending on critics' social trajectory and habitus. In this respect, the thesis shows that for critics and the most part of their



audience, engaging with rock, jazz and soul music meant rejecting the 'lower end' of national popular culture, particularly Italian light music (*musica leggera*) and public television.

Secondly, focusing on the reception and evaluation of what, in the 1970s, were new cultural genres for Italian audiences, the thesis considers the aesthetic impact of music on both the habitus of Italian critics and their practices of evaluation. In this respect, it combines Bourdieu's field theory with DeNora's theory of music as an autonomous social force (DeNora 2002), and theorises musical evaluation as a *social encounter* between actors and musics endowed with distinct (and distinctive) histories and trajectories. As I will argue in Chapter 7, such an approach avoids privileging either the properties of social actors (in a Bourdieusian fashion) or musical properties (in line with DeNora and others). Instead, it focuses on cultural evaluation as a *relational practice* emerging from the encounter between people and cultural forms. This approach allows for an exploration of the impact of music on the experience of critics and, as a result, on the doxa of cultural fields. Conversely, it makes it possible to analyse the ways in which critics' national and institutional position shaped their engagement with different musics. In essence, such a perspective makes it possible to understand why some musics matter for Italian critics, and what answers they provide to their historically and socially specific concerns.

Thirdly, by analysing the letters that readers sent to music magazines, and the way in which they were mediated by critics, the thesis explores the role of magazines as *technologies of reflexivity* about cultural practices (particularly music listening) and the social differences shaping both Italian youth culture and the music press as a field. As a result, the thesis explores the forms of reflexivity enabled by the field and

its institutional routines, but also considers the limitations of such reflexive moments. From a theoretical standpoint, it theorises reflexivity as a possibility that might be enabled by some cultural fields. In this respect, it problematises Bourdieu's normative view of reflexivity as a marginal aspect of social action (Bourdieu 1990, Bottero 2010), and reframes it as an empirical and field-specific question. Moreover, the thesis approaches the relationship between critics and audience as an ongoing form of labour, rather than as a pre-established 'homology' (Bourdieu 1984, 1996). As Chapter 8 will argue, critics had to construct their relationship with readers providing justifications for their choices and showing that they took readers' concerns seriously. Moreover, the social diversity of magazines' readership problematises Bourdieu's homology as long as the concept implies a similarity of class position between cultural producers and their audience. Overall, while contributing to a better understanding of how (popular) music criticism works, the thesis highlights some general properties of cultural fields, such as their global interconnectedness, the aesthetic fascinations shaping their social life, and the forms of reflexivity that they may support or prevent.

### **Methodological approach**

In order to explore the historical genesis of popular music criticism, as well as critics' evaluative practices, the thesis is based mostly on archival work. On the one hand, it uses music magazines as primary data in order to access critics' discursive repertoires. On the other hand, it draws on secondary sources – such as histories of post-war Italy, critics' public biographies and quantitative data on the audience of music magazines – in order to construct a social history of the music press as a cultural sector, which includes a reconstruction of the social trajectory of critics and

readers. In this respect, the thesis follows the model of socio-historical enquiry proposed by Bourdieu's major study of the French literary field (1996). In contrast to that model, however, it pays significantly more attention to the meanings that critics ascribed to both different musics and their own labour. In this respect, the thesis combines social history with thick description; the latter being accomplished via discourse analysis and thematic analysis.

The thesis proposes a distinctive operationalisation of practices (Bourdieu 1990). Indeed, music magazines have been used to enquire about three distinctive practices of evaluation: critics' position-takings (Bourdieu 1996) vis-à-vis cultural and political institutions, that is, the way in which they constructed popular music criticism as a new cultural practice in relation to the Italian context; the evaluation of different popular music genres (such as rock, jazz and soul); and the ways in which critics addressed the concerns of their readers. The advantages as well as limitations of this approach will be fully discussed in Chapter 4. The chapter also describes the process through which practices have been operationalised in relation to different editorial formats (e.g. features, editorials, readers' letters). In this respect, the thesis addresses evaluative practices with a strong public dimension, leaving aside, for the most part, 'production' practices such as editorial meetings, practices of editing and other activities which would be accessible only through ethnography.

Furthermore, in line with the comparative dimension of field theory, the thesis explores the practices of magazines which occupied different positions within the music press. In this respect, I have studied three different magazines: one of them, the weekly *Ciao 2001*, was the most successful publication in terms of selling figures, and – as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 – was explicitly concerned with maximisation of profit and *economic autonomy*. The thesis compares the strategies of

this ‘heteronomous’ actor (Bourdieu 1993, 1996) with two magazines which were more concerned with artistically challenging music, radical political engagement and symbolic autonomy from market constraints (the monthlies *Muzak* and *Gong*). In spite of these different orientations, I will show that Italian popular music criticism – in line with other forms of contemporary cultural work (Hesmondhalgh 2006, Banks 2007) – problematises Bourdieu's dichotomous understanding of autonomy and heteronomy. Such questions, and more generally the importance of economic autonomy for Italian popular music critics, will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6.

### **Thesis aims and order of discussion**

The thesis provides an original contribution to the study of media, music cultures, cultural production and consumption in a variety of ways:

- It explores the impact of globalisation on national cultural fields, and theorises fields as social spaces shaped by aesthetic experience and forms of reflexivity.
- It theorises people's national position as a structuring dimension of their engagement with culture, and explores the forms of distinction enabled by non-national popular culture.
- Focusing on music, it theorises cultural evaluation as a relational process shaped by culture's aesthetic power as well as people's social biography.
- It highlights the role of critics within a diverse and globally connected popular culture.
- It studies the semi-legitimation (Regev 1994) of popular music from a transnational and comparative perspective.

**Chapter 1** defines the social and scholarly relevance of cultural criticism. It reviews the ways in which cultural production theories have conceptualised the role of critics in art worlds and media industries, but also recent empirical work addressing the practices of critics within contemporary popular culture. The chapter argues that disciplinary distinctions between the sociology of culture, cultural sociology and cultural studies have partly limited empirical research about such topics. Further, the chapter identifies the reception of criticism and the impact of globalisation and national differences on critics' practices as underresearched topics.

**Chapter 2** situates the study of criticism vis-à-vis the conflicting research agendas of music studies (particularly stemming from sociology and cultural studies). More specifically, it reviews theories of music's aesthetic autonomy, research about music's embeddedness in social differences and practices of distinction, and studies that explore and theorise music's global circulation. The chapter bridges these different strands in order to identify new avenues for empirical research about music criticism. Further, it argues for a *critical* perspective on musical practices, which takes into account music's emotional and aesthetic powers without underestimating the social differences and institutional struggles in which such powers are inscribed.

**Chapter 3** defines the thesis' theoretical framework. It introduces the key concepts of Bourdieu's field theory (1993, 1996), its uses in recent research about popular music and culture, and the most recent critiques to such an approach. Further, drawing on post-Bourdieuian cultural theory (e.g. Lamont 2012), the chapter theorises fields as *pragmatic accomplishments* sustained by ongoing material and symbolic labour, rather than unchallenged and slowly changing social structures. It argues that such a standpoint facilitates research on the effects of global forces on the construction of national cultural fields; the impact of aesthetic fascinations on the

practices of cultural producers; the forms of reflexivity and critique enabled by specific fields of practice.

**Chapter 4** discusses the thesis' methodological rationale and the way in which the theoretical framework defined in Chapter 3 has been operationalised. More specifically, it discusses the combination of social history and thick description, the use of music magazines and secondary sources, the revision of data through the use of NVivo, and the translation of data excerpts from Italian to English.

The first analytic chapter, **Chapter 5**, focuses on the social and historical genesis of Italian popular music criticism. Firstly, it outlines the structural changes that enabled the emergence of the field, and describes the social boundaries that shaped the participation of Italian young people to its inception. Secondly, it explores the social construction of the field and the way in which critics defined its symbolic boundaries. The chapter argues that critics' social trajectory and privileges enhanced their *cosmopolitan critique* of Italian cultural institutions, and thus their strategy of distinction vis-à-vis 'debased' forms of popular culture. Such a disposition towards Italian culture was thus a form of 'ordinary' cosmopolitanism (Lamont and Aksartova 2002, Beck and Sznaider 2006, Regev 2007a), one that was shared by all the actors of the field notwithstanding their institutional differences. In this respect, the chapter focuses on critics' shared stakes vis-à-vis the Italian context.

**Chapter 6** focuses on the ways in which the political mobilisations arising from the musical field, and other sectors of 1970s Italian society, affected the institutional differentiation of the field. In this respect, it focuses on the *strategies of engagement* of music critics and, more generally, on how they used politics to define different (and opposing) cultural projects. The chapter argues that music critics redefined political engagement according to the logics of the field. In other words, they used

their cultural capital as a *political resource* in order to devise distinctive (and mutually exclusive) strategies of political intervention.

While the first two analytic chapters focus on the boundaries of the music press vis-à-vis Italian cultural and political institutions, **Chapter 7** analyses the way in which critics evaluated popular music genres imported from the US and UK. More specifically, it explores how critics' national position and institutional affiliation shaped their engagement with rock, jazz and soul music. The chapter theorises cultural evaluation as a *social encounter* between music's autonomous properties and critics' social biography. In this respect, it explores critics' relationship with the emotional power, cultural history and social imaginary of different music genres. Moreover, it shows that musicians' ethnicity and gender significantly affected the evaluations of critics and, therefore, the way in which they experienced the music. **Chapter 8** explores the meanings that readers ascribed to different music magazines and to the aesthetic and social distinctions defined by critics. Conversely, it explores the way in which critics addressed the concerns of readers. The chapter argues that magazines acted as *technologies of reflexivity* for their audience. Indeed, they enhanced reflections about different dispositions (Bourdieu 1984) toward music, and about the social differences shaping the Italian youth culture as well as the music press. However, by mediating letters according to specific editorial strategies and cultural frames, critics 'regulated' the reflections of readers, thus orienting (and partly limiting) the role of magazines as means of reflexivity.

I now turn to the ways in which sociology and cultural studies have defined the social and scholarly relevance of critics, and to the recent rise of a 'sociology of criticism' as a distinct arena of debate from both production and consumption

studies.



## **Chapter 1**

### **Why do critics matter? Mapping the emergence of a sociology of criticism**

This chapter considers the ways in which media critics and cultural journalists<sup>1</sup> have been studied within sociology and cultural studies. More specifically, it discusses contributions stemming from the sociology of culture and cultural sociology<sup>2</sup> (which have addressed fields as different as film, music and the IT sector), and from popular music studies (which have worked mostly on post-1960s rock criticism). The chapter's first part will discuss the ways in which the social and scholarly relevance of critics has been defined in cultural production theories. The second part, then, will review more recent empirical research drawing on such theories, and will critically assess the major tendencies shaping it. I will argue that an emergent area of debate – the sociology of criticism – has gained momentum in recent years, but that it is characterised by strong epistemological and methodological differences. More specifically, I will argue that the literature reviewed either isolates the discursive practices of critics from their institutional context (in the case of cultural sociology and popular music studies), or addresses criticism as a practice strongly determined by broader social arrangements (in the case of the sociology of culture). In contrast, I will make the case for a methodological approach, which, drawing on Bourdieu's field theory (1993, 1996), analyses the ways in which critics' practices of meaning-

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<sup>1</sup> Focusing on critics, the chapter does not discuss the literature on 'cultural intermediaries', which has addressed a broader variety of professional figures working in contemporary cultural industries (see Negus 2002, Wright 2005, Matthews and Smith Maguire 2012). As I argue in this chapter, a 'sociology of criticism' has emerged precisely to study the distinctive role of critics in contemporary popular culture.

<sup>2</sup> The difference between sociology of culture and cultural sociology is discussed throughout the chapter. For a broader discussion of such differences, as well as the differences between cultural sociology and cultural studies, see McLennan (2002), Inglis (2007) and Couldry (2010).

making are shaped by their position within a broader institutional space.<sup>3</sup> Further, the chapter will highlight two major gaps in the literature. Firstly, existing studies consider mostly American and British case studies, thus providing a limited conceptualisation of the ways in which *space* – and particularly national and local spaces – shape the practices of critics. Secondly, the literature has largely neglected the relationships between critics and their audience. As a result, both the meanings that different audiences ascribe to the work of critics, and the ways critics justify their work to their audience, remain unexplored issues.

### **1.1 Critics in the culture worlds**

What is cultural criticism? What makes it a distinctive social practice? And how is it receiving growing attention in the social sciences and humanities? Before the emergence of a body of empirical research about the practices of critics, their role in both cultural industries and the arts had been considered mostly by cultural production theorists, especially by Paul Hirsch (1972), Howard Becker (1982) and Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1993, 1996). These scholars did not provide empirical studies about the work of critics, but situated their role vis-à-vis the broader routines of cultural industries and art worlds. Since their contributions have strongly informed the agenda of more recent studies, it is important to consider the ways in which such theories define the social relevance of critics through distinctive epistemological perspectives.

Although different in important respects, the works of Hirsch, Becker and Bourdieu aim at ‘deconstructing’ cultural production. That is, they look at the collective, organised and conventional dimension of cultural worlds, thus rejecting a romantic

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<sup>3</sup> This approach will be fully discussed in Chapter 3.

conception of the artist as a great individual imbued with extraordinary capacities (Wolff 1987). As a result, their theories conceive of cultural production as an *institutional* activity made possible by social relations and shared conventions, and it is from this premise that they address the function of critics. According to Hirsch (1972), critics perform an important organisational role in cultural industries working as ‘gatekeepers’. More specifically, acting as ‘remote consumers’, critics make a selection from the cultural objects produced by different producers, thus filtering their output for media audiences. Hirsch’s framework, which is influenced by organisational and economic sociology (Hirsch 2000), stresses the division of labour within cultural production, rather than conflict among different institutional actors or within organisations. From this standpoint, critics are strategic figures who may influence the success of cultural products and the ‘fads and fashions’ of cultural markets. In sharp contrast, Howard Becker and Pierre Bourdieu have focused on the *symbolic labour* of critics, and the extent to which they contribute to the making of cultural boundaries. According to Becker (1982: 131-164), critics do not simply provide plain descriptions of given cultural objects, but produce evaluations based on more or less coherent systems of value (*ibid.*, pp. 131-134). As a result, criticism is one of the conventional activities that sustain art worlds as collective and social (rather than individual) enterprises. By applying shared evaluative standards, critics put into practice important symbolic resources to define the ‘moral’ boundaries between what belongs to the realm of art and what, on the contrary, is excluded from it (*ibid.*, p. 136). In other words, critics contribute to the making of cultural distinctions which, as stressed by Pierre Bourdieu, may support the reproduction of social privilege and inequality (1984). Although Bourdieu, like Becker, underlines the importance of critics’ symbolic labour, he proposes a rather different

conceptualisation of artistic production with the concept of cultural fields (1993, 1996).<sup>4</sup> This concept frames culture worlds as defined by social and symbolic ‘struggles’ rather than collective cooperation (as argued by Becker).<sup>5</sup> From this vantage point, critics do not simply contribute to the construction of consensus about artistic standards, but are institutional actors in competition with each other. Since critics occupy different positions within cultural fields, and are endowed with different amounts of economic and cultural capital, they struggle to legitimate both different cultural objects and different principles of legitimation (Bourdieu 1993: 36). Critics are therefore key actors in the social conflicts over what constitutes legitimate (and by corollary illegitimate) culture. Furthermore, underlining the unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources in modern societies, Bourdieu establishes a series of relative ‘homologies’ between cultural fields and the (national) social space, arguing that cultural producers speak for an audience occupying the same social position.<sup>6</sup> I shall return on the concept of homology in Chapter 3, where I will discuss (and revise) Bourdieu's field theory. The potentiality and limitations of the concept, then, will be fully explored in Chapter 8, where I will address the social function of Italian music magazines for their readers.

Overall, the accounts discussed provide a range of specific epistemological stances on the work of critics, which emphasise their organisational, cultural and social functions in different ways. More specifically, the accounts of Becker and Bourdieu stress the key function of critics' symbolic labour, with Bourdieu's critical

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<sup>4</sup> Chapter 3 provides a more detailed review, as well as a critique, of field theory. Here I focus on the way in which Bourdieu frames the social role of critics.

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Becker does recognise that disputes may occur among cultural producers. However, he argues that given the highly conventional and institutionalised nature of cultural production, conflicts are an exception rather than the rule (Becker 1982: 134-135).

<sup>6</sup> For example, in his study of consumption practices in France (1984), Bourdieu frames a new generation of cultural journalists – the ‘new cultural intermediaries’ – as members of a new petite bourgeoisie devoted to the appraisal of less ‘legitimated’ cultural genres, like jazz music and film (1984: 319-329).

perspective (Boltanski 2009) pointing to the power relations informing their role in cultural fields. Such perspectives are an important complement to Hirsch's focus on the organisational mechanisms of cultural production and, as I show below, have had a remarkable impact on recent research addressing the work of critics in popular culture. However, cultural production theories do not provide empirical studies of criticism as an *institution in itself*, that is as an autonomous social space inhabited by competing organisations and supporting a variety of cultural practices. In the following sections, I will discuss how more recent research stemming from the sociology of culture, cultural sociology and popular music studies has filled this gap.

## **1.2 Critics between sociology of culture and cultural sociology**

The sociology of culture has been one of the areas in which the work of critics has been analysed in greater detail. However, the topic has been considered from different epistemological and methodological angles that reveal some of the major disputes taking place within the field. Indeed, studies about cultural critics reveal an ongoing tension between *institutionalist* approaches to the study of culture – particularly the ‘production of culture’ approach (Peterson and Anand 2004) and neo-institutionalism (DiMaggio 1982, DiMaggio and Powell 1991)<sup>7</sup> – and the more recent tendency towards a ‘cultural sociology’ (Friedland and Mohr 2004). While the former tradition looks at the ways in which structural, organisational and technological arrangements affect the production of cultural commodities, the latter approach is more concerned with the autonomy of culture from social structures and with the empirical analysis of meaning-making practices. In this section, I review the

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout the chapter I use the word institutionalist to indicate studies drawing both on the production of culture approach and neo-institutionalism (particularly DiMaggio's work on cultural classifications; 1987). Indeed, both approaches have been remarkably influential on the (American) sociology of criticism.

contributions to the study of criticism emerging from these arenas of debate and point to the issues that remain unexplored by the existing literature. I will argue that such approaches do not yet provide a convincing link between criticism as a discursive practice and criticism as an institutional activity, where they tend to focus on just one of these aspects. Furthermore, I will highlight that both approaches focus predominantly on American case studies. As a result, the literature deals with national differences and the dynamics of globalisation only in a few cases (Jacobs 2012). Finally, focusing on critics' reviews of cultural products, the literature underappreciates the variety of practices performed by critics and the reception of criticism among audiences.

#### *1.2.1 Institutional approaches and explanatory analyses*

The practices of critics have been a strategic site of analysis for researchers working within the institutionalist paradigm. In line with this tradition, some scholars have been concerned with the ways in which organisational factors and production systems impact on the work of critics (Janssen 1997, Blank 2007), but also with criticism itself as a determining influence on the choices of consumers (Shrum 1991) and on the cultural 'consecration' of popular cultural genres, like American film (Allen and Lincoln 2004) and popular music (Schmutz 2005). Although addressing different topics, these studies are all concerned with issues of *causation*,<sup>8</sup> that is, they assess the likelihood that a specific outcome (e.g. consumers' or critics' choices) will be affected by a given range of factors. This kind of analysis is usually effected via regression analysis (especially logistic regressions), a well established form of

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<sup>8</sup> For a more extensive discussion of causation, and for an overview of the ways in which the concept is conceived in different traditions of social research, see Bryman (1988: 31-44).

quantitative explanatory analysis.<sup>9</sup> For example, Schmutz (2005) has used regressions in order to investigate the role of *Rolling Stone* magazine as an institution of ‘retrospective cultural consecration’ for popular music albums released between 1955 and 2003. Schmutz has measured the likely impact of several variables on the inclusion of albums in *Rolling Stone's 500 Greatest Albums* list (2003), such as albums' age, commercial success and recognition at the time of release (e.g. Grammy nominations and awards). This analytical strategy makes it possible to enquire about the statistical significance of factors that are likely to influence the choices of critics. However, it does not provide much detail about the ways in which critics make sense of their institutional environment and justify their choices. Indeed, regression analyses can only calculate the statistical likelihood that a given outcome (the dependent variable) will be affected by a range of other factors specified by the scholar (independent variables). This limitation is common to a number of other studies, which, albeit adopting different methodological designs, employ regressions to engage with issues of causation, particularly as regards the impact of organisational arrangements on the choices of critics (e.g. Janssen 1997, Allen and Lincoln 2007, Kersten and Verboord 2013). As a result, this approach does leave both the discursive dimension of criticism unexplored, and the ways in which broader national and institutional contexts inform critics' ‘categories of perception’ (Bourdieu 1993, 1996) and ‘justifications’ (Boltanski and Thevenot 1999). I shall return to these questions in Chapter 3, where such concepts will be discussed in detail. More recently, the impact of institutional constraints on critics' practices has been addressed through ethnographic research and in-depth interviews by Blank (2007), who has studied the production processes of reviews evaluating dining

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<sup>9</sup> See Blaikie (2003: 116-158) for a discussion of the technical, methodological and epistemological issues involved in the use of regressions and other forms of explanatory analysis in quantitative research.

experiences and software products. Blank's research shows that different production arrangements lead to different evaluative standards and epistemologies. For example, as long as the evaluation of software is based on statistical tests and is highly mediated by technology, the reviews of critics – which combine quantitative data and descriptions – show a distinctive positivist epistemology. By contrast, the evaluation of dining is based on the personal opinions of 'connoisseurs' who display their personality and individual taste in reviews. The work of Blank represents an important contribution about the work of institutions dealing with different objects of evaluation, and it also analyses some of the ways in which readers use critics' reviews (*ibid.*, pp. 157-178). However, in line with the production of culture approach, he focuses on two general formats of evaluation – 'the procedural' and 'connoisseur' review – and frames them as the outcome of two different, but similarly general, systems of production. As a result, he does not consider the internal variations of such conceptual models relevant, hence the differences between forms of criticism dealing with diverse cultural genres (e.g. film, music, different music genres and so on). Since the category of connoisseur review may describe any form of cultural criticism based on personal expertise, the concept is not very useful for analysing the institutional diversification of criticism within contemporary popular culture.

### *1.2.2 Quantitative cultural sociology and critics' discourses*

More recently, scholars drawing on neo-institutionalism and the production perspective have shown a growing interest in the analysis of critics' discourses; an interest that is coupled with a more traditional consideration of the structural and organisational factors affecting discursive practices (e.g. Baumann 2001, van



Venrooij and Schmutz 2010). Some of these studies can be considered part of a growing ‘quantitative cultural sociology’ whose aim is to measure meaning-structures and discursive repertoires, rather than explore them through thick description (see Mohr and Rawlings 2012). From a methodological point of view, quantitative cultural sociologists have analysed critics’ discourses through content analyses measuring discursive patterns over a time span of several decades (e.g. Schmutz 2009, Schmutz et al. 2010).<sup>10</sup> The aim of such studies is to address the historical change of established cultural classifications (DiMaggio 1987), and particularly the changing boundaries between high and popular culture. For example, Baumann’s research on the artistic legitimization of American film (2001) analyses the reviews of American critics published between 1925 and 1985, showing that critics progressively framed movies according to ‘highbrow’ categories such as originality, authorship and innovation. Baumann also maps the broader structural changes that made possible the artistic legitimization of American film, both at the level of American society (e.g. growing access to post-secondary education since the late 1950s) and at the level of film production (e.g. the decline of the Hollywood studio-system). A similar interest in the artistic legitimization of popular culture has fostered a range of longitudinal studies comparing the arts coverage of ‘quality’ newspapers in different national contexts. These studies look at both discursive conventions mobilised by cultural critics (van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010), and the space that newspapers devote to different artistic genres (Janssen et al. 2008), with a few of them looking specifically at popular music genres (Schmutz 2009, Schmutz et al. 2010). Like Baumann’s work, such studies map changing trends over a large time span, and have operationalised artistic legitimization as the *quantity of space* that

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<sup>10</sup> Quantitative sociologists studying critics have occasionally used different methods. For example, van Venrooij (2009) draws on network analysis in order to map the links between genre-labels and evaluative criteria in critics’ discourses.

newspapers give to different discursive conventions – such as high and popular criteria of evaluation (Schmutz and Verooij 2010) – and different cultural genres (Janssen et al. 2008). By and large, such methodological strategies appear suitable to ascertain the frequency with which critics employ different standards of evaluation both in relation to traditional artistic practices, like classical music (Glynn and Lounsbury 2005), and to ‘less legitimated’ cultural forms, like popular music, film (Kersten and Bielby 2012) and television (Bielby et al. 2005). However, they appear problematic if the scholar’s aim is to analyse in greater detail the variety of meaning-making practices performed by critics. Indeed, there are a number of dimensions of criticism as a social practice that such studies have left unexplored. First of all, they have not addressed the institutional diversity of criticism in popular culture. In other words, they have not investigated the differences between media (e.g. newspapers, specialised magazines, blogs) and, more generally, between publications pursuing different aims and cultural politics. As I will argue in Chapter 3, a field perspective (Bourdieu 1993) may better account for how such differences have emerged in (popular) cultural criticism. Further, the aforementioned studies’ focus on highbrow and popular evaluative criteria leaves other discursive repertoires unaddressed. In this respect, it does not account for what I call self-legitimation strategies, that is the justifications (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999) that critics provide about their institutional orientations and, more generally, the social significance of their work.<sup>11</sup> As I will argue in Chapter 5, Italian music critics were deeply committed to defining the significance of popular music criticism as a new cultural field – an issue which they used to address through articles defining both the cultural politics of music magazines, and the boundaries between the critics’ musical taste and the ‘debased’

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<sup>11</sup> This remains true even when quantitative content analysis is based on a more heterogeneous sample including editorials and interviews. See Binder and Cheyne (2010: 342).

taste of Italian popular audiences. By and large, such self-legitimation strategies, and more generally the *symbolic boundaries* (Lamont and Molnàr 2002)<sup>12</sup> of criticism as a cultural practice, have been ignored by the quantitative literature. Such literature, then, has not explored the extent to which critics' perspectives may be shaped by national differences<sup>13</sup> and broader socio-historical transformations. Indeed, despite providing some details about social-structural arrangements at the national level (e.g. Schmutz and van Verooij 2010: 400-403), quantitative studies do not consider the ways in which critics make claims of legitimacy vis-à-vis national (as well as global) institutions, fields and audiences.

These as well as other issues may be better explored through a qualitative strategy, one which may complement the methodological tool-kit of quantitative cultural sociologists. In this respect, rather than opting for a deductive operationalisation of highbrow and popular criteria, a qualitative strategy may focus on the extent to which such a distinction makes sense for critics and audiences. This is a limitation emerging, for example, in the work of Shrum (1991). While categorising the shows of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe as 'highbrow' or 'popular' for analytical purposes, he admits that such difference is debatable since it is neither established by the audience, nor by the festival's organisers (*ibid.*, pp. 360-361). Scholars working on newspapers' cultural criticism have developed their codes in a more convincing way, either inductively (Kersten and Bielby 2012) or drawing on a broad literature of theoretical and empirical studies (e.g. Glynn and Lounsbury 2005: 1035-1040; van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010: 404-406). However, the meaning that the hierarchy of high and popular culture has for critics themselves, and its relevance for critics'

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<sup>12</sup> I will provide a more thorough discussion of this concept in Chapter 2.

<sup>13</sup> A partial exception is Griswold (1987), who has considered the impact of national differences on the evaluative criteria of literary critics.

justifications, are issues which have not yet been explored. Furthermore, the focus on highbrow and popular criteria as mutually exclusive categories downplays the more specific meanings that critics may ascribe to different cultural genres. In this respect, music sociologists have recently argued that music's emotional and aesthetic power may enable the construction of a variety of meanings (DeNora 2000), and that such meanings may be encoded in genre-specific terms (Fabbri 1982, Frith 1998: 75-95, Santoro 2002).<sup>14</sup> This means that social actors ascribe a range of social meanings to musical practices that may escape a clear-cut distinction between high and popular culture. Studies focusing on such a distinction, then, are not well equipped to analyse discursive repertoires that may be both context-dependent and specific of different cultural forms.<sup>15</sup> As I will further argue in Section 3, scholars working within popular music studies have addressed such issues in a more convincing way. For example, Lindberg and colleagues (2005) have shown that popular music criticism, particularly American and British 'rock' journalism, has produced an 'intermediary aesthetic' (*ibid.*, pp. 338) combining notions of aesthetic and social transgression with a celebration of consumer culture and its pleasures. More generally, popular music studies have shown that rock criticism has historically developed complex notions of cultural and social authenticity (Frith 1983, Lindberg and Weisethaunet 2010). By and large, a qualitative approach to the study of critics' practices and discourses may contribute to the existing literature exploring how critics draw subtler distinctions *within* popular culture (Thornton 1995, Frith 1998), and how they define the significance of their work vis-à-vis different historical circumstances and national contexts. As I will argue in Chapter 3, such an approach is not in contradiction with

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<sup>14</sup> I will review research stemming from music sociology in Chapter 2.

<sup>15</sup> A partial exception is Binder and Cheyne's (2010) analysis of the coverage of hip hop provided by American newspapers. Having developed their codes inductively, the authors have found that place, location, and race are key discursive themes in critics' evaluation of hip hop.

the study of the institutional dimension of criticism.

### *1.2.3 The contribution of the 'strong programme'*

More recently, the work of critics has been addressed by some proponents of the 'strong programme', a scholarly movement arguing for a more meaning-centred cultural sociology.<sup>16</sup> According to Alexander and Smith (2002, 2010), the American sociology of culture has historically conceived of cultural practices as determined by structural and institutional forces. By contrast, cultural sociology addresses culture as a range of autonomous meaning-structures (such as narrative oppositions and discursive tropes) imbued with aesthetic and emotional powers. According to Alexander and colleagues, these *aesthetic* elements are pivotal to understanding the functioning of contemporary societies. Although scholars drawing on this paradigm have addressed the work of critics only in a few cases, it is important to discuss their contribution since they propose a distinctive approach to the topic, one that emphasises hermeneutics and thick descriptions as viable methods. While recognising the merits of the strong programme, I will argue that it tends to underestimate the relationship between the meaning-making practices of critics and broader social arrangements. Further, Alexander and colleagues' focus on meaning-structures raises some of the same problems already discussed as regards institutionalist and quantitative approaches. That is, they do not provide sufficient attention to the national spaces (and global context) in which critics work. Finally, although emphasising the agency of social actors and their capacity for questioning cultural practices and representations, the strong programme has not yet provided a

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<sup>16</sup> Although the strong programme does not represent the totality of directions emerged from cultural sociology, it is the tendency which has addressed critics as an object of study in the most explicit way. There are other scholars who have contributed to the recent turn to cultural sociology and who situate themselves outside the strong programme (see Hall et al. 2010). Some of their approaches will be discussed in Chapter 3.

convincing analysis of the ways in which the ‘performances’ of critics (Alexander 2011) are both received and questioned by their audience.

Alexander and Smith (2002, 2010) see the strong programme as a break from other approaches that conceive of culture as a ‘dependent variable’ of social structures and institutional environments. The authors ascribe the label of ‘weak programmes’ to a variety of approaches, which (in their opinion) fail both to theorise the role of culture in social action, and to provide convincing empirical analyses of the ways in which people mobilise cultural codes. The list of approaches deemed as weak includes the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, Michel Foucault’s discourse theory, Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of culture and American institutionalist approaches to cultural production. For example, while recognising the merits of cultural studies and their focus on the meaning of everyday practices, the authors argue that such an approach reduces cultural practices to social struggles.

[In cultural studies] Terms like ‘articulation’ and ‘anchoring’ suggest contingency in the play of culture. But this contingency is often reduced to instrumental reason (in the case of elites articulating a discourse for hegemonic purposes) or to some kind of ambiguous systemic or structural causation (in the case of discourses being anchored in relations of power). (*ibidem*)

Although the authors tend to reduce the complexity of the paradigms criticised,<sup>17</sup> the strong programme appears distinctive in its proposal of a meaning-centred social

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<sup>17</sup> A critique of Alexander’s generalisations is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is worth mentioning that even his most recent work (Alexander 2011) tends to ignore post-1970s cultural studies, thus providing a rather crude rendition of a field that has produced different (if not conflicting) cultural theories. See, for example, the way in which Stuart Hall’s work has been subsequently reworked through the concept of ‘circuit’ (Johnson 1986-87, du Gay et al. 1997).

theory.<sup>18</sup> Such a proposal, however, ‘brackets’ the potential influence of both institutional environments and social stratification on practices of meaning-making. This stance has raised allegations of ‘idealism’ (McLennan 2005) and, more generally, it has been argued that cultural sociology supports a ‘sentimental view’ of society, which has little to say about issues of inequality, power and exclusion (Gans 2012).

Alexander has recently used cultural critics as a case study to expand his programme towards a consideration of everyday performances (2011: 195-216) and the materiality of culture (2012: 25-38). In his discussion, critics are endowed with a distinctive hermeneutic power, that is, they can ‘naturalise’ the value of objects, thus contributing to the construction of their ‘iconic’ power (Alexander 2011: 206-207). In this respect, critics mobilise cultural codes both to construct objects as intrinsically meaningful artifacts, and to deconstruct (that is, criticise) their ‘natural’ meaning and value. However, such performances are not necessarily successful, since critics themselves are objects of both positive and negative evaluations by their audience. More generally, in his theoretical discussion of the notion of performance, Alexander makes very clear that social performances may ‘fail’ if they are perceived as ‘constructed’ or unconvincing by audiences (*ibid.*, p. 25). Indeed, a successful performance needs the ‘belief’ of people, but in contemporary societies this form of ‘enchantment’ is difficult to achieve because it may be undermined by a variety of factors, such as social differentiation among audiences, and the highly mediated nature of public performances in contemporary societies.

Alexander’s conception of criticism as a practice based on ongoing performance and

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<sup>18</sup> It is important to stress that this perspective does not give priority to the ‘voice’ of social actors, as it occurs in ethnography and other forms of qualitative research. On the contrary, the focus on cultural ‘structures’ implies that the sociologist will look for *formal* elements – like underlining ‘binary oppositions’ of meaning – and other cultural schemes that may be unconsciously employed by people.

subject to contestation is useful in order to provide a hermeneutically richer picture of critics' practices, one that integrates the view of critics as (largely unchallenged) agents of legitimation proposed by institutionalists and quantitative cultural sociologists. However, Alexander provides a highly theoretical and mostly speculative take on the subject. As a result, he does not pay attention to the variety of practices that critics may perform, nor the extent to which different national (Lamont and Thévenot 2000) and institutional contexts (Bourdieu 1996) may enable different meaning-making practices.<sup>19</sup> The critic, thus, is described as an ideal-typical figure, and while Alexander's aim is to highlight the explicative power of his theory (rather than to provide a detailed empirical study), his approach appears less useful to explore the highly diversified nature of criticism in popular culture. Moreover, his perspective ignores the 'old' but still relevant question of critics as agents involved in the making of cultural distinctions and, potentially, the reproduction of social privilege (see Section 1).

Cultural critics have been addressed also by the work of Jacobs (2012), a sociologist close to the strong programme who sees critics as part of a broader 'aesthetic public sphere' nourished by entertainment media and popular culture. According to Jacobs, entertainment media are an important cultural resource in contemporary societies. Indeed, social actors draw on popular culture to define their *cultural citizenship*, that is, to make sense of their identity vis-à-vis contemporary social, political and economic arrangements. While such forms of citizenship nourish new forms of social critique and civic engagement (and more generally people's relationship with political institutions), popular culture itself may provide important forms of socio-political commentary about contemporary issues, for example through fictional

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<sup>19</sup> Similar problems emerge in the contribution of Roberge (2011) about online criticism. Drawing on both Alexander and Jacobs, he provides a similarly ideal-typical account of the function of criticism in contemporary popular culture.



narratives and the intervention of critics. *Contra* Habermas (1989), and in line with more recent critiques of the public sphere (e.g. Fraser 1990), Jacobs sees popular culture as a legitimate part of the public sphere and as a resource for public intervention on matters of common concern. The global circulation of media texts, then, is seen as an integral part of the aesthetic public sphere. For example, ‘foreign’ cultural texts may foster debates in specific national contexts about issues of cultural policy and identity, like in the case of British media debates about the risks of ‘Americanisation’ (*ibid.*, pp. 330-342). By and large, Jacobs’s framework opens some unexplored possibilities for the study of cultural criticism. Firstly, he links cultural evaluation to forms of civic participation and to the making of cultural identities (or citizenship), thus highlighting the importance of studying critics’ discourses beyond the mere application of aesthetic criteria, and vis-à-vis broader questions of cultural identity. Secondly, he highlights the contextual dimension of criticism, framing it as part of a broader system that involves other institutions and audiences. However, in line with the strong programme, Jacobs focuses on meaning-making practices at the expense of social differences and power relations. Further, his approach seems to underappreciate the sheer diversity of contemporary popular culture, framing ‘entertainment media’ as a somehow homogeneous cultural arena. Such a perspective, thus, risks downplaying important questions of institutional and social diversity. However, in spite of such blind spots, Jacobs’ argument acknowledges that critics may perform a wider variety of practices than just reviewing cultural products – an issue which I will explore throughout the data chapters.

Overall, the strong programme has emphasised mostly the hermeneutic power of cultural criticism (Alexander 2011) and the public reflexivity it may enhance (Jacobs

2012). Such perspectives provide a useful complement to the analyses of sociologists of culture, and encourages more meaning-centred empirical explorations. However, being concerned mostly with *cultural* causation (Alexander 2011), that is with the aesthetic and emotional power of culture, the strong programme tends to underestimate both potentially ‘constraining’ social arrangements, and the role of culture as a means of inequality. By contrast, in Chapters 2 and 3 I will argue for a critical approach to the study of music criticism, one that acknowledges the autonomous power of culture (particularly music), and takes into account the social and institutional differences that mediate such power.

This section has focused on the epistemological and methodological differences between the sociology of culture and cultural sociology, and has shown how such differences have shaped the ways in which scholars study the work of critics.

However, the discussion has also highlighted a series of shared blind spots. Firstly, both paradigms have rarely addressed the ways in which national spaces, as well as global cultural changes, shape the practices of critics; a question considered, to some extent, only by Jacobs (2012). Secondly, both approaches have underestimated the reception of criticism and, more generally, the relationship between critics and their audience. Finally, focusing mostly on the study of reviews, they have left unexplored (and undertheorised) the diversity of critics' evaluative practices and, by extension, the diversity of contemporary popular culture. I will now turn to a range of contributions emerging mostly from cultural studies and, more specifically, from the interdisciplinary field of popular music studies.

### **1.3 Critics in the music worlds: the contribution of popular music studies**

The field of popular music studies has shown a strong interest in the practices of

music critics in recent years. In this section, I discuss this literature highlighting both its strengths and limitations. I will argue that a strong focus on American and British journalism, and particularly on the case of rock criticism, has prevented a deeper understanding of the contexts and institutions shaping popular music criticism as well as a wider exploration of critics' practices. Furthermore, a tendency to focus on the discourses of music critics has not been paralleled by sufficient attention to the institutional contexts in which they work, and has sometimes been coupled with a lack of methodological clarity.

### *1.3.1 The centrality of Anglo-American rock criticism*

The function of critics within music (sub)cultures has been highlighted by several popular music scholars. Indeed, it has been argued that music journalism mediates notions of cultural 'authenticity' in relation to practices of music production and consumption (Frith 1983: 165-177), and that critics are among the main producers of historical canons and narratives (Thornton 1990). According to Frith (1998), music critics contribute to the construction of a 'knowing community' among their readers (*ibid.*, p. 67), which is based on shared values about the ways in which music should be produced and consumed. In this respect, critics define in normative ways an 'ideal musical experience' (*ibid.*), thus making distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate musical practices. Further, it has been argued that critics have contributed to the artistic 'semi-legitimation' of popular music during the second half of the twentieth century, particularly with genres like pop-rock (Regev 1994) and jazz (Lopes 2002).

Despite having been considered key mediators in music cultures, critics have been addressed by empirical studies only recently. Such studies have enriched a research

tradition that had focused mostly on production and consumption practices, for example studying subcultural communities (Hebdige 1979, Thornton 1995), music producers (Hesmondhalgh 1998, Toynbee 2000, Banks 2012), the music industry (Negus 1999, Marshall 2013) and, more recently, fan communities (Duffett 2013). While sociologists of culture have studied the critics of quality newspapers, popular music scholars have addressed mostly the work of specialised music magazines dealing with pop-rock music (e.g. *Rolling Stone* and *New Musical Express*) and, to a lesser extent, fanzines (Atton 2009, 2010). By and large, such literature has focused on critics' discourses (Brennan 2006, Elafros 2010, Atton 2010), and has addressed broader institutional and social arrangements to a lesser extent (Forde 2001, Lindberg et al. 2005).<sup>20</sup> In this respect, only a few scholars have proposed more general conceptualisations of critics' role within music cultures (Frith 1983, 1998), and broader research agendas addressing different dimensions of criticism (e.g. its production, reception, historical transformations and so on) have been proposed only by Toynbee (1993) and Jones (2002).

Furthermore, while focusing mostly on discourses, the majority of studies address Anglo-American case studies, and more specifically rock criticism. This narrow focus on popular music journalism presents problems that have not been openly discussed within the field, and which I will now address in some detail. Such problems are partly related to the cultural status ascribed to rock criticism by scholars and journalists alike. Drawing from the ideology of high-art, rock critics apply notions of originality and innovation to a selected range of popular music acts (Regev 1994). As a result, rock journalism has historically developed as a form of 'serious' cultural criticism, with critics being perceived (and perceiving themselves)

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<sup>20</sup> The work of Forde (2001, 2006) represents a significant exception within the literature, being one of the few which address in detail the production practices of music critics. The topic has been partly explored also by Nunes (2010), and Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2011).

as public intellectuals (Powers 2010). The scholarly focus on a journalistic genre endowed with a distinctive symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1984) has been coupled, on the one hand, with an underestimation of journalistic discourses about other music genres (e.g. jazz, hip hop, rhythm 'n' blues, folk, electronic music). On the other hand, it has led to a limited consideration of more 'commercial' or 'mainstream' forms of music journalism. In this respect, the most extensive historical account about the development of American and British rock criticism explicitly excludes magazines defined as 'teen glossies' from its scope (Lindberg et al. 2005: 7). Similarly, in her study of the ways in which the music press constructs gendered representations of musicians, Leonard (2007) does not analyse 'some pop titles' (*ibid.*, p. 67) with a predominantly female audience, focusing on (serious) music magazines targeting a male audience. More generally, scholars have only considered in a few cases music magazines that do not seem to support a high-art discourse about popular music (Hill 2006), or that explicitly target a female readership (Railton 2001). As a result, the tendency of considering the work of 'serious' rock critics has prevented the comparative study of different forms of popular music journalism, and thus the study of its institutional diversity. Furthermore, only a few studies address the ways in which critics construct the symbolic boundaries between different music genres, like rock and jazz (Brennan 2006), and studies about publications specialising in genres other than rock are a small part of the literature (e.g. Chang 2002, McLeod 2002). These are all significant shortcomings for a field that has paid considerable attention to how the music press reproduces forms of discrimination and exclusion, especially in relation to gender (Davies 2001, McLeod 2001, 2002; Kruse 2002; Johnson-Grau 2002; Leonard 2007; Elafros 2010). Indeed, such focus is significantly less common in the contributions stemming from the sociology of

culture.<sup>21</sup> As I will show in Chapters 7 and 8, a comparative analysis including the more ‘feminine’ (i.e. commercial) pole of music criticism may provide a better understanding of the ways in which the music press both maintain and challenge existing forms of inequality.<sup>22</sup>

Research in popular music studies has also paid scant attention to the forms of music criticism emerging from non-anglophone countries. The problem is made evident by the work of Lindberg et al., who define Anglo-American rock criticism as an influential ‘transnational field’ (2005: 198). In a subsequent study of Northern European music magazines (Lindberg et al. 2006), the same authors substantiate their claim showing that British and American rock criticism have been a powerful influence on the emergence of local forms of rock journalism in Northern Europe. However, this comparative study remains an exception, as well as studies dealing with non-anglophone forms of music journalism (e.g. Nunes 2010). As a result, the emergence of popular music criticism beyond (and in relation to) the American and British contexts still needs to be studied in detail. Moreover, while this is largely an empirical question, studying non-anglophone forms of music criticism may shed further light into the broader networks and power dynamics shaping transnational cultural fields. I shall return to such question in Chapters 2 and 3.

### *1.3.2 What kind of discourse?*

It has been argued that studies about rock criticism tend to focus on the analysis of discourses. At the same time, however, many studies remain vague about the epistemological underpinnings of this concept and the way in which it has been

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<sup>21</sup> For an exception see Schmutz and Faupel (2010) on gender, and van Venrooij (2011) on race.

<sup>22</sup> I provide a more detailed discussion of the studies addressing gender and music criticism in Chapter 7.

operationalised. More specifically, the label ‘discourse’ indicates very different strategies and analytical points of view in music journalism studies. For example, for Lindberg and colleagues, discourses are ‘specific means at the disposal of the field's agents’ (2005: 337), which include journalists’ aesthetic ideologies and stylistic practices (*ibid.*, pp. 4-5). From this standpoint, the authors analyse the individual voices of the most recognised British and American music critics, looking at the ways in which they developed personal notions of cultural authenticity. By contrast, Stratton (1982) takes the discourses of music critics about the emotional power of ‘good’ music as the ‘ideological resolution of a real economic conflict’ (*ibid.*, p. 283). In other words, critics' discourses are framed as a romantic ideology masking the industrial and economic nature of both music journalism and the music industry at large. More generally, there are significant methodological differences between the gendered representations analysed by Leonard (2007), the narratives addressed by Atton (2009) and Brennan’s analysis of the cultural politics of different magazines (2006). Except for a few studies (Lindberg et al. 2005, Elafros 2010), the lack of an explicit discussion of such methodological choices obscures a more fine-grained understanding of the practices of music journalists. In this respect, the aforementioned studies analyse different practices, editorial formats and institutions (e.g. fanzines and magazines), but they rarely conceptualise such differences. However, a clearer conceptualisation may show that music magazines perform a wider array of practices than just reviewing albums. Such practices may include forms of political critique and social commentary, the mediation of readers’ concerns (for example through the publication of either letters or online comments), and the production of a range of non-discursive data (charts, discographies) and non-evaluative discourses (news). These practices may define quite different institutional

identities. This lack of conceptual clarity may arguably be related to distinctive disciplinary conventions. Indeed, in contrast to the sociological literature, contributions stemming from popular music studies tend to avoid methodological discussions (e.g. choice of method, sampling and research strategy). In this respect, Marshall (2011) has recently criticised the field arguing that it has become a progressively self-referential area, one which is shaped by a 'cultural studies agenda' and, as a result, rarely engages with sociological research and social theory. According to Marshall, this tendency also prevents the development of a solid line of (sociological) empirical research about popular music cultures (*ibid.*, pp. 161-162). While Marshall's generalisations go beyond the scope of this thesis, his argument appears correct if applied to many studies about the music press. It is true that analyses of music journalism rarely engage with broader fields of debate, and they also show a lack of connection with closer spaces of debate such as jazz studies. Some empirical studies, then, are difficult to assess because of a lack of open discussion about their methodological choices.

Overall, popular music studies have shown a growing interest in the work of music journalists in recent times. In comparison to the sociological literature discussed in the previous sections, studies stemming from this field have provided richer accounts of the discursive practices of critics, and have more frequently addressed the forms of inequality that the music press may continue to reproduce (particularly as regards gender). However, I have argued that the centrality of rock criticism in the literature has limited the exploration of a number of issues, such as critics' discourses about different music genres, the study of more market-oriented magazines, and the study of popular music journalism in contexts other than the United Kingdom and United States. More generally, the focus on rock criticism has limited the study of the ways



in which journalists make distinctions *within* popular culture, hence the study of how they contribute to the construction of boundaries between different music genres, an issue that I will address particularly in Chapter 7. Additionally, while developing a consistent line of research about critics' discourses, popular music scholars have rarely provided a clear definition of such discourses, as well as a deeper sociological understanding of the relationships between discourses, practices and institutions (a question to which I return in Chapter 3). Finally, in line with the studies stemming from the sociology of culture and cultural sociology, popular music studies have not yet addressed a number of questions concerning the audience and reception of criticism. As a result, we still do not know very much about the uses of music criticism, the meanings that readers attach to different publications, and the ways in which critics both address and construct their audience.

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the ways in which different fields of debate have contributed in recent years to a growing scholarship about the work of cultural critics in the arts and cultural industries. I have discussed both the strengths and limitations of different approaches – particularly those stemming from the sociology of culture, cultural sociology and popular music studies – and have identified some issues that require further research. By and large, I have argued that research on cultural criticism is not very attentive to issues of context. Indeed, there has been little discussion about the ways in which *space*, that is, different local and national settings, may shape the contours of criticism. Furthermore, it has been argued that the literature tends to emphasise either the institutional or the discursive dimension of criticism, with the result that theoretically and methodologically sound links

between the contexts, institutions and practices of critics have not been established yet. I have also argued that the research has focused on a very specific practice (critics' reviewing of cultural commodities), and has left the relationship between critics and their audiences largely unexplored. The next chapter will focus more specifically on the implications of studying *music* criticism. In other words, it will focus on the cultural autonomy of music and will situate the study of criticism vis-à-vis the concerns expressed by music sociologists and scholars.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Situating criticism within the social and cultural study of music**

The chapter situates the study of cultural criticism in relation to debates stemming from music sociology and popular music studies.<sup>1</sup> More specifically, it discusses three dimensions of music's relationship to the social: music's aesthetic autonomy and power on social action; music's embeddedness in social differences and practices of distinction; and music's global circulation in contemporary societies. Although criticism has been an underappreciated object of study in relation to such questions, I will argue that they highlight different but equally relevant dimensions of music criticism as a social practice, and that the study of criticism (particularly the Italian case) may contribute to a deeper understanding of such processes.

The first section discusses recent conceptualisations of music as an autonomous social force, which as such may 'move' people (Frith 1998) and enhance both forms of individual and social change (DeNora 2004). By contrast, the second section addresses studies, which, drawing on Bourdieu (1984) and Lamont and Molnár (2002), explore the ways music contributes to forms of inequality and social exclusion. *Contra* an understanding of such traditions as mutually exclusive (Hennion 1997, Cormick 2009, Born 2010), I will argue that a consideration of music's autonomy may enrich (rather than weaken) a *critical* perspective on musical practices, one considering how aesthetic experiences shape (and are shaped by) social and institutional struggles. The last section discusses research addressing the consequences of globalisation on the production and consumption of music (Regev 2007b). I will argue that an attention to recent studies about the global circulation

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<sup>1</sup> Despite some overlaps and common concerns, such fields have developed relatively different debates and conceptual languages. See Marshall (2011).

(and local reception) of music may further enrich the study of music's role in practices of distinction, as well as broader processes of social reproduction and change.

## **2.1 The autonomy of music: theoretical perspectives**

Sociology has adopted a variety of perspectives on the study of music-related practices and institutions, especially during the second half of the twentieth century. Such perspectives partly resonate with the broader paradigms that have been discussed in Chapter 1. In this respect, the emergence of institutionalist approaches to the study of culture, particularly Becker's art worlds perspective and Peterson's production of culture, has nourished an internally diversified literature about the production of music (Dowd 2004). This literature has addressed topics such as the relationship between music production and genre classifications (DiMaggio 1982, Negus 1999), the historical and structural transformations of the music industry (Peterson and Berger 1975), and the impact of technology on the circulation of music (du Gay et al. 1997). However, a distinctive interest for music consumption, audiences and musical communities has emerged from the mid-1970s onwards (Grazian 2004). This development is well represented by subcultural studies, which, drawing on cultural studies (Hebdige 1979, Thornton 1995) and postmodern theory (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004), have selected music as a key site for the investigation of contemporary youth cultures.<sup>2</sup>

By and large, contemporary music sociology engages with a wide variety of musical practices; with music criticism being a recent addition to this body of research (see

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<sup>2</sup> Subcultural studies have established a longstanding tradition of empirical research about deviant and 'non-normative' (Gelder 2005: 1) cultural practices, especially in relation to music. I discuss some contributions stemming from this field below as well as in Chapter 3. However, a full discussion of subcultural theory is beyond the scope of the thesis. See Hesmondhalgh (2005), Webb (2007) and Allett (2010) for critical discussions of major trends within the field.

Chapter 1). However, in recent years there has been a significant theoretical shift in the way in which scholars conceive of the relationship between music and the social. Notwithstanding their differences, scholars like Frith (1998), DeNora (2000, 2004), Hennion (1997, 2008) and Born (2005, 2010) have progressively stressed the importance of music's sonic, emotional and social force, arguing that music may enhance change both at the subjective and socio-historical level (DeNora 2004). As a result, the question of the 'relative autonomy' of music from other social forces has gained centrality in contemporary music sociology. The very idea of *music sociology* as different from a *sociology of music* concerned with how the social 'determines' musical practices (DeNora 2004) resonates with the distinction between cultural sociology and sociology of culture discussed in Chapter 1. This 'musical turn' can be recognised in different theoretical contributions. For example, Frith (1998: 273-274) has argued that music may enhance people's 'social movements' through 'affective and emotional alliances', as long as music communities are not held together by similarities in social position, but by shared knowledge and feelings (see also Allett 2010). Moreover, both DeNora (2000) and Hennion (2008) have pointed to the dialectical nature of music listening, arguing that the meanings people attach to music are the result of a 'co-production' involving both the listener's social biography and the properties of musical pieces. In this respect, DeNora (2000: 40-44) has proposed the notion of 'affordances' in order to identify the possibilities that specific musical pieces provide listeners for semiotic work and social use. From this standpoint, music's lyrics and sonic structures, as well as music's socio-historical connotations (e.g. attributions of genre)<sup>3</sup>, can be employed by people in a variety of everyday practices. For example, music may organise mundane rituals like waking

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<sup>3</sup> Chapter 3 provides a more detailed discussion of genre theory and its relationship with the thesis' theoretical rationale.

up and going to work, but also more structured practices like aerobics. More generally, it may be used to cope with emotions and memories. Music, then, provides ‘semiotic particles’ (*ibid.*, p. 62)<sup>4</sup> that social actors may appropriate for different purposes. This line of theorising has not ignored the technological devices through which music is experienced (e.g. albums, stage performances and digital technologies). Indeed, both Hennion (1997) and Born (2005) have argued that they play an important role in the co-production of music’s meaning and affect.<sup>5</sup> Such theories have productively reshaped music sociology introducing a concern for issues like materiality, feeling and meaning (see also McCormick 2012). However, while widening the field’s theoretical and empirical agenda, they have downplayed both the social differences among people engaging with music, and the institutional differentiation of musical practices. Theories of music’s autonomy, then, do not engage with the differences between forms of music-making, ways of listening, or with criticism as a distinctive musical practice. Moreover, such theories avoid a critical consideration of the social differences and inequalities in which music is embedded. In this respect, Prior (2011) has recently argued that the work of DeNora and Hennion proposes a micro-sociological approach that may sustain a form of ‘micro-aestheticism’ (*ibid.*, p. 134). In other words, the language of such theories risks being almost indistinguishable from the language of aesthetic contemplation of social actors. As a result, they could be less able to look at musical practices from sufficient critical distance. Furthermore, while framing the uses of music as depending on different needs and social settings, DeNora – in her most extensive discussion of musical practices (2000) – proposes a rather limited notion of social

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<sup>4</sup> DeNora takes the concept of semiotic particles from Keith Negus (1996: 94-96).

<sup>5</sup> The turn to music’s autonomous properties is partly informed by actor-network theory, an explicit influence in the work of DeNora and Hennion.

context. This notion is based on face-to-face interactions and leads, according to DeNora, to ethnography as the most appropriate method to explore people's relationship with music (*ibid.*, pp. 38-39).<sup>6</sup> As a result, her theoretical framework does not take into account broader social contexts. For example, it does not consider the extent to which national differences, as well as the global circulation of music, may impact on music's uses and the generation of music's meaning. Recently, the work of DeNora and Hennion has been criticised also by Born (2005) and Marshall (2011). Born has stressed the limits of a notion of social context that is too dependent on *in situ* interactions, arguing that music's meaning is neither completely contingent nor totally dependent on people's uses, but becomes stabilised through broader institutional processes.<sup>7</sup> As a result, musical structures acquire enduring socio-historical connotations, which has such may impact on music's uses. The practices of musicians, for example, are constantly shaped by the possibilities and constraints provided by musical canons (Born 2005: 24). On a different note, Marshall (2011) argues that DeNora and Hennion underappreciate the specificity of music's sonic and semiotic properties. As a result, while framing music as imbued with autonomous powers, their theories do not consider the ways in which specific sounds and musical structures enhance social action:

[D]iscussions of specific musics remain relatively absent from [DeNora's] empirical investigations, so that 'music' is in danger of becoming reified – to say that all people use 'music' does not tell us why certain kinds of music are used in particular ways.

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<sup>6</sup> However, more recently DeNora (2004) has proposed historical research as a viable method to explore the role of music in broader institutional and socio-historical processes.

<sup>7</sup> To be fair, while focusing on music's everyday uses (2000), DeNora has never argued that music's meaning is *completely* contingent, and her theory of music's affordances recognises the importance of music's historical and genre-specific connotations (*ibid.*, pp. 12-13). However, this aspect of her work largely disappears in Born's critique.

(*ibid.*, p. 167)

As I will argue in Chapter 3, the work of DeNora can be fruitfully integrated with Bourdieu's field theory in order to account for the ways in which the national position and institutional role of music critics inform how they make sense of different musical properties, such as sonic elements (e.g. guitar riffs) and the socio-historical connotations of different music genres. In this respect, I will theorise musical evaluation as a *social encounter* between actors and musics endowed with different socio-historical properties and trajectories, thus introducing a focus on people's social biography within a debate which has emphasised mostly music's autonomous properties. I will also discuss the contribution of genre theory to such an approach, whose empirical potential will be fully explored by Chapter 7.

Although theories of music's autonomy are a key feature of contemporary sociology of music, it would be incorrect to conclude that critical perspectives on musical practices have completely disappeared from the picture. In this respect, it is possible to identify a number of studies focusing on the extent to which music is entwined with practices of social distinction and 'boundary-work' (Lamont and Molnár 2002). Such scholarship is particularly relevant for the study of music critics, since it addresses, in many cases, producers of meanings such as civil and political authorities (Appelrouth 2005, 2011), cultural associations (Santoro 2010b), public competitions (McCormick 2009) and occasionally journalists (Schmutz and Faupel 2010, van Venrooij 2011). In the following section, I review this research stream underlining its main tendencies and relevance for the study of music criticism. I will also show that some scholars have been able to integrate theories of music's autonomy within the study of broader institutional and social struggles. As a result,



they show that a consideration of music's autonomy does not necessarily exclude a critical perspective on musical practices (Banks 2012, Hesmondhalgh 2012), and that music's role in social action can be studied taking into account *both* its aesthetic power and its role in sustaining existing inequalities and differences.

## **2.2 Music and the social: practices of distinction and boundary-work**

According to Roy and Dowd (2010), music is ‘a mode of interaction that expresses and constitutes social relations (whether they are subcultures, organizations, classes or nations) and that embodies cultural assumptions regarding these relations’. Several studies have contributed to substantiate this claim in recent years. These studies have explored music's embeddedness in broader cultural classifications (Santoro 2002, Appelrouth 2011), practices of social distinction (Savage and Gayo 2011, Atkinson 2011), and – to a lesser extent – music's role as a symbolic ‘bridge’ between different social groups (Roy 2002).<sup>8</sup> By and large, this scholarship shows that musical categories are rarely a question of plain aesthetic distinctions (e.g. pop-rock versus classical music). On the contrary, they are usually charged with moral and social assumptions about the people<sup>9</sup> (e.g. musicians and audiences) that music is supposed to represent, particularly on the lines of gender, age, race and class. For example, Roy (2004) has shown that the distinction between *race music* and *hillbilly music* – set by the US recording industry in the early twentieth century – had a strong impact on the practices of musicians. It created genres based on both aesthetic and social expectations, and such expectations remained in place even when the distinction was replaced by the categories *rhythm & blues* and *country & western*. Similarly, in her

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<sup>8</sup> According to Roy, ‘folk music’ was used as a racially inclusive category by American folk revivalists in the 1930s and 40s, thus acting as symbolic ‘bridge’ between black and white workers.

<sup>9</sup> See Middleton (1990) for a broader discussion about the kinds of ‘people’ with whom popular music has been historically associated.

ethnography of the UK club culture, Thornton (1995) has shown that clubbers make distinctions between ‘authentic’ and tasteless club cultures, framing the latter as both female and working class. Certain music genres, then, may be associated with entire social categories. In this respect, Binder (1993) has shown that US media commentaries about metal and rap, between 1985 and 1990, consistently associated the two genres, respectively, with a white middle-class audience and with a black audience of ‘dangerous’ young people. From a different angle, recent research drawing on Bourdieu (1984) has shown that different ways of appreciating music – as well as other cultural products – still depend on people's trajectory and position within the social space (see Bennett et al. 2009, Purhonen and Wright 2013, Savage and Prieur 2013). As argued particularly by Atkinson (2011), Savage and Gayo (2011) and Rimmer (2012), a highbrow disposition toward popular music, as well as a tendency toward ‘cultural omnivorousness’<sup>10</sup>, are displayed mostly by the British (younger) middle classes.<sup>11</sup> Crucially, while earlier theorisations of omnivorousness (Peterson and Kern 1996) framed consumption of popular music as an indicator of cultural tolerance, more recent studies show that key social differences emerge in *how* people engage with music, rather than in *which* genres they consume. In this respect, expert judgement, subtle musical knowledge and cultural openness are ‘dispositions’ (Bourdieu 1984) that require cultural and economic capital. More recently, the study of music's embeddedness in social differences has gained new vigour from the broader research programme addressing ‘symbolic’ and ‘social boundaries’ (Lamont and Molnàr 2002, Lamont et al. 2007). According to Lamont

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<sup>10</sup> For a broader discussion about cultural omnivorousness see Peterson and Kern (1996) and Peterson (2005). For a critique to the concept and the related methodology see Atkinson (2011), Savage and Gayo (2011), Rimmer (2012). A full discussion of this debate is beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>11</sup> By contrast, Bennett and colleagues' elder (upper-middle class) respondents reject contemporary popular music, their cultural capital being invested mostly in classical music. Atkinson (2011), then, suggests that familiarity with (and appreciation of) classical music is still significantly ‘classed’ in the UK.

and Molnàr (2002), symbolic boundaries result from the differences that people and organisations draw between people, objects and practices, as well as between different spaces and times. In this respect, they result from the strategies through which actors define more or less exclusive (and exclusivist) identities. Further, while symbolic boundaries mark differences that do not necessarily translate in social exclusion, 'social' boundaries indicate more resilient forms of inequality, which may be sustained through the making of symbolic boundaries as well as other practices. More generally, the relationships between symbolic and social boundaries are not straightforward: symbolic boundaries can strengthen social and status differences, but they can also constitute symbolic bridges between different groups (Lamont and Aksartova 2002).<sup>12</sup> Such a research programme provides a fine-grained perspective on classificatory practices and forms of social distinction. While proposing a useful distinction between discursive classifications (symbolic boundaries) and practices of exclusion (social boundaries), it broadens the scope of Bourdieu's work (1984) focusing on a variety of institutional settings, practices and symbolic capitals. As a result, it has reframed the empirical agenda of some music sociologists, who have explored the boundary-work performed by different institutional actors. The ways in which groups and organisations inscribe music in symbolic and social boundaries have been explored through a variety of methodological strategies, including historical research (Santoro 2002, Roy 2002), quantitative descriptive and explanatory analyses (Sonnett 2004), and more recently content and discourse analysis (McCormick 2009, Appelrouth 2011). Qualitative studies, in particular, have shown that boundaries can be drawn in very different ways according to the interests and positions of individuals, groups and organisations. For example, Appelrouth

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Lamont and Aksartova (2002) show that white working class people, in the US, display cultural 'openness' towards black colleagues considered hard-working and honest.

(2011) has argued that while jazz music was entering the American ‘mainstream’ between 1917 and 1930, different social actors (e.g. musicians, political and civic leaders, public intellectuals) defined jazz according to conflicting aesthetic and social categories. For example, political authorities charged jazz as socially ‘retrograde’:

[T]he music’s alleged assault on aesthetic standards was [seen as] nothing less than an attack on the moral code of those who sought to legitimate existing social hierarchies (*ibid.*, p. 232).

On the other hand, musicians tried to define the music as socially ‘safe’ and aesthetically vital. Moreover, Appelrouth shows that music’s capacity at ‘moving’ people may become the object of symbolic struggles among actors willing to define the ‘moral’ meaning of such power. As a result, while jazz was framed as ‘moving the body’ by a variety of commentators, the question was morally charged depending on the position of different actors (Appelrouth 2005).<sup>13</sup>

People struggling to define music and its place in society can also appropriate public and media events in order to draw and justify new symbolic boundaries. For example, Santoro (2010b) has shown that in the late 1960s, the suicide of the Italian singer-songwriter Luigi Tenco enabled the emergence of new aesthetic and institutional distinctions within the field of Italian popular music. Focusing on the work of a specific group of critics and professionals (the *Club Tenco*), the author shows that the suicide became a cultural resource for educated young people working towards the construction of a new artistic sub-field and music genre (the singer-songwriter song or *canzone d’autore*). This study problematises the very opposition

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<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 7 for an analysis of the ways in which Italian music critics addressed music’s emotional force.

between the sociology of culture and cultural sociology. Indeed, Santoro shows that a symbolically-charged public event could be mobilised as a resource in the construction of new organisational structures. By contrast, production studies have considered mostly the opposite process, namely the impact of structural arrangements on cultural production. Research addressing organisations and groups dealing with musical classifications has also enquired about memory as a site of boundary-work and symbolic struggle. In this respect, Bennett (2009) has shown that the diversification of actors and institutions producing memories about popular music (e.g. small labels, websites, museums) is related to the production of different ‘heritage discourses’. As a result, such actors support competing narratives about the past of pop-rock music, contributing to the construction of canons and ‘counter-canons’. Overall, the work of Appelrouth, Santoro and Bennett broadens music sociology’s focus on meaning and affect, showing that while music engenders affective attachments, such feelings may nourish very different practices and perspectives. Put otherwise, ‘passion’ for music does not necessarily exclude social and institutional conflicts over its meaning and uses. On a similar note, Banks (2012) has recently argued that while music provides important ‘internal rewards’ to British jazz musicians – such as pleasure, a sense of fulfilment, self-realisation and so on – status differences and power struggles are an integral part of their experience of jazz. By and large, while such studies show that people’s social position and institutional role play a significant part in the generation of music’s meaning, they also problematise an overly simplistic opposition between music as a means of either social ‘reproduction’ or change; a question which I discuss further in the following section.

### 2.2.1 *Reproduction or social change?*

Within the literature on music and boundary-work, some scholars have addressed music critics as agents sustaining existing social boundaries, but also – at least in one case (McCormick 2009) – as agents enhancing forms of social change. The former research strand includes studies about the coverage of music magazines and the ways in which it strengthens existing inequalities on the lines of gender and race. For example, Schmutz's longitudinal analysis of newspapers' music coverage (2009) shows that symbolic boundaries between classical and popular music have become weaker between 1955 and 2005. More specifically, 'elite' newspapers in US, France, Germany and the Netherlands have progressively increased their coverage of music genres like rock and jazz. However, the research also shows that the more jazz and rock musicians received coverage, the more such coverage addressed *male* musicians. Newspapers, therefore, have sustained social boundaries based on gender while weakening symbolic distinctions between highbrow and popular culture. A similar research team (Schmutz and Faupel 2010) has analysed the list of 'the greatest albums of all time' published by the American magazine *Rolling Stone* showing a similar phenomenon: while women figure less than men among the 'greatest' artists, they are also less likely to be included in it (according to logistic regression analyses). Further, when included in the list, women are framed as emotionally unstable individuals and as artists whose career is strongly dependent on other (male) figures. On a similar note, van Venrooij (2011) has analysed the extent to which genre distinctions and social boundaries support each other. His study of newspapers' music criticism in the US and the Netherlands has found that music critics tend to compare artists *within*, rather than across, racial categories. In this respect, the study confirms that certain musical classifications (e.g. jazz, rhythm 'n'

blues) have been historically associated with racial classifications (e.g. jazz music as *black* music). As a result, such ‘homologies’ (Bourdieu 1984) between genre and race have been naturalised by the music press and other institutions of the music industry (see also Roy 2004).

These studies, stemming from quantitative cultural sociology (see Chapter 1), are able to highlight some of the ways in which critics contribute to the production of enduring inequalities. However, McCormick (2009) has addressed music critics in explicit polemic with this perspective, showing that they may contribute to challenging existing cultural representations and institutional practices. In her study of the *Cliburn International Piano Competition*, the author analyses the ways in which critics and the organisation sponsoring the competition struggle to define the public meaning of the event. According to McCormick, a ‘production perspective study’ would frame the competition simply as a mechanism through which prestige and reputation are distributed according to pre-existing social asymmetries, for example along the lines of status and gender. On the contrary, drawing on Alexander’s strong programme (discussed in Chapter 1), McCormick underlines the tropes through which both organisers and critics struggle to define the public meanings of the competition. Her argument is that power operates through publicly visible (and meaningful) disputes, rather than as a mechanism beyond the grasp of social actors. From this standpoint, overt social conflicts require skillful manipulation of symbolic means, as long as conflicts in the public sphere are also discursive struggles. McCormick eventually shows that the outcome may not necessarily be social reproduction. Indeed, since the late 1970s, media critics produced a ‘counter-narrative’ about the competition, which stressed its unfairness and potentially damaging effects on the nourishment of musical talents. Such a

narrative led the organisers to change the structure of the competition and to reframe its meaning, which was then depicted as a non-competitive ‘festival’ for musical talents, rather than as a potentially unfair ‘competition’.

These latter examples show the enduring tensions between the traditions encountered when reviewing research on cultural critics as well as music. By and large, while both the approaches are helpful in revealing different sides of music's embeddedness in social practices, they provide highly *normative* understandings of music's role in social action, and frame questions of social reproduction and change accordingly. By contrast, I will address such questions as empirical ones depending both on historical circumstances and on the institutional arrangements of different ‘fields of practice’ (Bourdieu 1990). I will further discuss this theoretical stance in Chapter 3.

This section has argued that the literature addressing the differences and inequalities in which music is embedded provides a useful complement to theories of music's autonomy. More specifically, while acknowledging the aesthetic power of music (e.g. Santoro, Appelrouth), these studies have considered the extent to which such power is mediated by social and institutional differences (as well as struggles). As a result, they provide an important critical stance on musical practices. More generally, they show that music may both *bond* and *divide* people, and that music's uses cannot be easily crystallised into a normative theory of music's role in social action.

In the next section, I will argue that a more thoughtful consideration of music's global circulation may further enrich the study of such issues. In this respect, I will argue that the literature addressing the impact of globalisation on musical practices has underappreciated the social and institutional differences shaping ‘local’ music cultures. Conversely, while studies addressing music and boundary-work have



considered the organisation of national cultural fields (van Venrooij 2011) and the availability of distinctive cultural resources at the national level (Santoro 2010b), they have rarely reflected on how spacial differences, as well as globalisation, shape struggles over music's meaning and practices of distinction.

### **2.3 The global circulation of music: trends and analytical categories**

The impact of globalisation on the production, circulation and consumption of music has been discussed to a considerable extent during the last twenty years. On the one hand, increasing recognition of the transnational flows of capitals, people and cultural goods connecting contemporary societies (Appadurai 1990) has fostered more careful consideration of the spaces in which music is produced, consumed and experienced (Mitchell 1996, Stokes 2004). On the other hand, scholars have addressed the circulation of musical idioms across national borders (Regev 2007b, Toynbee and Dueck 2011) and, more generally, the geographical dispersion of contemporary music scenes (Straw 1991, Webb 2007). In this section, I review these debates focusing on different conceptualisations of the intersections between global cultural flows and local musical practices. More specifically, I chart a shift from earlier approaches to 'local' music communities to more recent theories providing a deeper understanding of the impact of globalisation on musical practices. I will then discuss both the potentialities and shortcomings of such theories for the study of popular music criticism.

#### *2.3.1 From communities to scenes*

Studies analysing the local reception of globally spread musics have emerged from ethnomusicology, popular music studies and sociology from the 1990s onwards.

According to Stokes (2004), early ethnomusicological studies were informed by polarised interpretations of the social and cultural effects of globalisation. As a result:

[A]n opposition between global and local, system and agency, pessimism and optimism, top-down and bottom-up approaches to globalisation, and Marxian and liberal has [...] been inscribed firmly in the ethnomusicological approach to globalisation from the beginning (*ibid.*, p. 50).

More recently, scholars have taken a less normative stance on the production of locality, conceiving of it as a ‘project in which many actors have an interest and a stake’ (*ibidem*). Although this appears to be true for some recent research stemming from sociology (see below), the institutional and social differences informing ‘the local’ have been frequently overlooked in popular music studies. In this respect, the latter have addressed mostly processes of ‘indigenisation’, studying the ways in which globally spread musics are appropriated by local musicians and listeners. For example, Mitchell’s research (1996) on local appropriations of pop, rock and rap in various national contexts (Italy, Czech Republic, Australia and New Zealand) emphasises the creativity of local musicians who employ ‘foreign’ musical styles to forge alternative forms of national popular music (like Italian hip hop and Czech rock). In such national contexts, music becomes a resource to be mobilised in power struggles between cultural producers and other national institutions (e.g. political ones). Mitchell’s approach, in line with a broader tendency in popular music studies (Biddle and Knights 2007), is explicitly against the ‘cultural imperialism’ thesis.<sup>14</sup> Stressing the structural power of (mostly American) producers of cultural

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<sup>14</sup> See Morley (2006) for a broader discussion of the cultural imperialism thesis.

commodities, this perspective equates ‘economic power with cultural effects’ (Mitchell 1996: 51). However, while Mitchell highlights the agency of local musicians, showing that music may act as an important means of cultural identity (Whiteley et al. 2004), his approach comes very close to a ‘romanticisation’ of the local. In this respect, his study underestimates the institutional and social differences among the actors participating in specific music communities. Moreover, in line with other studies conceiving of music as a resource for disempowered groups (e.g. Anselmi 2002, Watkins 2004), it does provide only a few details on the cultural and political institutions against which musicians and audiences define ‘alternative’ cultural worlds.<sup>15</sup> More recently, Toynebee and Dueck (2011) have proposed a more cautionary framework for studying the practices of music communities, which focuses on ‘the appropriations of the less powerful’ (*ibid.*, p. 11), but without underestimating broader issues of political economy. By and large, however, studies of local music communities have rarely engaged with such communities as *hierarchical* social spaces. While successfully problematising an overly determinist account of cultural globalisation, they have focused mostly on the resistance of local musical communities vis-à-vis the global (or national) order.

A more sociologically informed view of the intersections between global cultural flows and local musical practices has been provided through the notion of ‘scene’. Originally developed as a postmodern alternative to subcultural theory, the notion of scene gives considerably more attention to the role of media in the construction of cultural worlds, which, in contrast to music communities, may not necessarily be confined to specific geographic locations (Straw 1991). While some scenes may be based in specific locations, like the London-based salsa scene (Urquía 2004) and the

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<sup>15</sup> In this respect, Chapters 5 and 6 provide a detailed discussion (and a social history) of the cultural and political institutions that popular music critics claimed to challenge.

Chicago blues scene (Grazian 2004), Bennett and Peterson (2004), as well as Straw (1991), acknowledge that a variety of media – like fanzines, radios and the Internet – may contribute to the construction of ‘translocal’ and ‘virtual’ scenes that do not necessarily involve face-to-face and *in situ* interactions among participants. More generally, the concept of scene, particularly as developed by Straw (1991), recognises the role of different institutional ‘infrastructures’ (e.g. record shops and independent record labels) in sustaining the symbolic and affective ‘alliances’ between geographically dispersed social formations. In this respect, the concept highlights a key dimension of the global circulation of music, namely the fact that membership of a musical world may be based on highly mediated practices; and on cultural fascinations for sounds, producers and communities that do not necessarily share the same geographical space and social background of audiences. However, while several studies recognise the internal struggles and power relationships shaping music scenes (e.g. Grazian 2004, Webb 2004, Spring 2004, Kahn-Harris 2004), they focus mostly on the *shared meanings* that producers, fans and other participants attach to scenes. As a result, they tend to downplay the different roles of the actors participating in music scenes and the degree of institutionalisation of their practices. For example, Hodgkinson’s study of post-rock fanzines (2004) provides an in-depth analysis of the ways in which the fanzine community contributes to the construction of a shared discourse surrounding the genre and its musicians. However, the article does not consider differences among the fanzines analysed and remains relatively silent about the relationships between fanzines and the official music press (albeit the former are framed as an ‘alternative’ to magazines like *New Musical Express* and *Melody Maker*). Similarly, Kahn-Harris’s study of the global extreme metal scene (2004) emphasises the experiences shared by members of the scene, discussing the

differences between people's personal and professional involvement with it in a limited fashion (e.g. differences between those making a living out of extreme metal and those who participate only as fans). In this respect, the concept of scene has been criticised for downplaying the impact of social differences and social stratification on the formation of musical worlds (Hesmondhalgh 2005). To be sure, Straw (1991) takes this problem into account in his discussion of North American alternative rock, which in the author's account emerges as a largely male, white and middle-class music scene. The problem, then, is that the notion of scene does not provide *subtler* analytical distinctions to tackle the relationship between music and the social. As I will argue in the next chapter, Bourdieu's notions of field and practice provide a more nuanced framework to enquire about such a question, as well as to study empirically the local as a diversified space shaped by institutional and social differences.

### *2.3.2 Beyond the global-local nexus: national spaces, cultural fields, milieux*

More recently, some scholars have problematised the global-local duality, proposing a range of meso-level concepts whose objective is to provide a more detailed picture of the interplay between global forces and local musical practices. In a recent collection of essays, Biddle and Knights (2007) have explicitly criticised the dualistic conception of the global and local, which, they argue, has informed past studies of music communities. More specifically, they argue that conceiving of the local as a site of 'resistance', scholars have sometimes romanticised music communities as intrinsically 'subversive' (*ibid.*, p. 3). This tendency has been also fostered by a predilection for ethnographic studies of local communities, which have underestimated the influence of broader social arrangements. In this respect, the

authors propose the concept of the ‘vanishing mediator’ (*ibid.*, p. 11) to indicate the influence of social and cultural factors – such as national regulations and enduring forms of national identity – on the emergence of local musical practices. These factors of influence, the authors argue, may remain concealed from the understanding of participants to music communities, but may still shape their musical practices. The national is thus framed as important dimension for the analysis of global musical flows and their indigenisation. On a similar note, Stokes (2007) has argued that the study of musical practices vis-à-vis the dynamics of globalisation should be reframed as the study of musical ‘cosmopolitanisms’. While Biddle and Knights point to nation-states as underappreciated spaces of mediation, Stokes argues for a consideration of the institutional and social settings in which people’s musical ‘imagination’ takes place, which as such may influence the making of different musical ‘worlds’. Indeed, such worlds may represent the interests of different social groups and institutions, and may link the ‘cultural’ (i.e. meaning-making practices) with economic and political powers in unexpected ways. From such a standpoint, musical worlds represent an intermediary analytical dimension between globalisation as a set of structural and economic processes, and the agency of musicians, listeners and – potentially – critics. As I will argue in the next chapter, a *field perspective* makes it possible to pay attention to the national and institutional dynamics highlighted by Stokes as well as Biddle and Knights. Indeed, it enhances the empirical study of the intersections between institutional spaces of practice (e.g. the popular music press), the national space, and global socio-historic transformations. Further intermediary concepts have been recently proposed to problematise the distinction between global and local. Drawing on Schultz’s phenomenology and Bourdieu’s field theory, Webb (2007) has addressed the intersections between local

musical practices (i.e. musical 'milieux'), and the constraints and opportunities provided by national and global music industries (i.e. 'fields' of cultural production). From this standpoint, musical milieux involving cultural producers, entrepreneurs and fans are framed as relatively autonomous spaces in which it is possible to 'mediate' the pressures and demands of the music industry and the market. In other words, musical milieux are spaces that enhance the agency and creativity of social actors. Taking a different route into Bourdieusian theory, Elafros (2012) has proposed the concept of 'location' to highlight the ways in which the material and symbolic properties of different venues affect the practices of DJs. Locations, here, are social structures shaping the practices of DJs and the meanings they attach to their work. At the same time, Elafros retains Bourdieu's attention to the overall 'position' of DJing within national cultural fields.

Both Elafros and Webb focus on the creative practices of musicians, and look at the degree of agency they may exert within larger (and potentially constraining) arrangements. In this respect, they privilege the local over the national. By contrast, Regev (2007a, 2007b, 2011) has discussed national spaces in great detail in his recent reflection on the global spread of Anglo-American pop-rock from the early 1960s onwards. More specifically, Regev argues that pop-rock music has become a 'global' cultural resource enhancing the emergence of national pop-rock scenes both in Western and non-Western countries.<sup>16</sup> Drawing on Bourdieu and on Mayer's 'world society' paradigm, Regev adopts a distinctively institutionalist perspective on the development of national music scenes. The author conceptualises the emergence of national pop-rock fields as a feature of the new 'world society'; that is, a global world in which nation-states share similar organisational protocols, as well as

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<sup>16</sup> Regev's own empirical research has focused on Israel and Argentina (see Regev 2007b).

expressive resources. In this respect, pop-rock has become a shared expressive culture for producers and audiences whose aim is to acquire higher status within national cultural fields. Such actors are therefore part of a new ‘transnational’ cultural field (the field of pop-rock) and struggle against older and more established national institutions. Regev also suggests that pop-rock has been adopted by producers and consumers to claim new forms of national uniqueness (2007a) and ‘aesthetic cosmopolitanism’. In this respect, producing and consuming pop-rock music outside the Anglo-American world is a way to feel part of a broader (transnational) cultural world. Although meaning is not absent from such a framework, Regev does not focus on specific meaning-making practices, and in line with a Bourdieusian perspective, frames struggles for prestige and recognition as the ‘fuel’ of the whole process. As a result, cultural producers’ motivations for adopting Anglo-American pop-rock idioms in different contexts are downplayed. Put otherwise, the reception of pop-rock is not studied at the meso and micro level, thus an analysis of the internal diversity of national pop-rock fields is not provided. By focusing on pop-rock, then, Regev's account does not address the national reception of other popular music genres (e.g. jazz, folk and so on), and thus the ways in which people make distinctions between (and within) them. The thesis' data chapters, while showing that Regev's argument is applicable to the Italian context as well, will contribute to expanding the aforementioned gaps. Indeed, Chapters 5 and 6 will show that the construction of popular music criticism was entwined with the drawing of symbolic boundaries between the music press as a young and ‘cosmopolitan’ cultural field, and other national institutions (particularly cultural and political ones). In relation to Regev's account, I will thus provide a more detailed exploration of the network of institutions, audiences and technologies that music critics addressed in



order to define the autonomy of a new cultural field. I will also pay more attention to the *social* boundaries that shaped the music press, particularly in relation to gender, class, age and geographical location. Further, Chapter 7 will analyse the reception of different popular music genres and the ways in which critics conceptualised such differences. I will also pay attention to the sonic, emotional and social properties of different genres, thus exploring the affordances (DeNora 2002) that they provided to Italian critics. More generally, these chapters will explore the practices of music critics in light of the questions reviewed in this chapter.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has situated the study of criticism in relation to the cultural and social study of music. More specifically, I have discussed three different issues that scholars have considered relevant for the study of contemporary music cultures: the autonomy and aesthetic power of music; music's place in practices of social distinction (and thus its embeddedness in forms of inequality and privilege); and the global circulation and local reception of contemporary popular music. I have argued that these distinct research strands highlight different dimensions of music criticism as a social practice, and that (by corollary) its study makes it possible to shed further light onto their functioning. I have also argued for a critical perspective on the study of musical practices, one that takes into account music's aesthetic power but also the ways in which such power becomes inscribed in institutional and social struggles. From such a standpoint, I have advocated an empirical (rather than normative) approach to music as a means of social change and/or social reproduction. The next chapter will discuss Bourdieu's field theory and the way in which it has been revised in order to address such questions.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Music criticism as a pragmatic accomplishment: revising Bourdieu's field theory**

In order to study the practices of music critics, the chapter introduces and revises Pierre Bourdieu's notion of cultural field (1993, 1996). The first part introduces the theory's distinctive features and discusses both its potentialities and limitations. The chapter's second part considers the ways in which field theory has been used in research about popular music and culture, and argues that while reproducing some of problems with Bourdieu's theory, such research pays significantly more attention to the practices and identities of cultural producers.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on these studies and on post-Bourdieuian sociological theory (Lamont 2012), the chapter's last part conceptualises criticism as a *pragmatic accomplishment* based on ongoing material and symbolic labour, that is, on evaluative practices, public justifications and forms of boundary-work.<sup>2</sup> This perspective highlights the (institutionalised) operations performed by critics in order to sustain the field's symbolic economy. From this vantage point, the chapter identifies three dimensions of criticism – and cultural production more generally – that have been underappreciated in the literature reviewed so far and in Bourdieu's original formulation of field theory: the effects of global forces on the construction of national cultural fields; the impact of aesthetic experiences on the practices of cultural producers; the forms of reflexivity and critique enabled by specific fields of practice. While these questions will be empirically explored by the data chapters, here I discuss them as building-blocks of a

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<sup>1</sup> While some of these studies have been already discussed in Chapter 2, here I will focus on the way in which they employ Bourdieu's field theory.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of boundary-work.

revised field theory, one more attentive to the practices, narratives and identities of cultural producers.

### **3.1 The field of cultural production and Bourdieu's sociology of culture**

Pierre Bourdieu defined his theory of cultural fields through a series of theoretical essays (Bourdieu 1993) and with a major socio-historical study about the development of the literary field in Nineteenth-Century France (Bourdieu 1996). In this section I draw on these contributions in order to unpack the theory and its tool-kit of analytical concepts. However, in order to better situate the theory vis-à-vis Bourdieu's social epistemology, I will also make reference to his works on cultural consumption (Bourdieu 1984) and television (Bourdieu 1998). My own revision of field theory, then, will draw significantly on Bourdieu's understanding of practices (Bourdieu 1990).

As anticipated in Chapter 1 (Section 1), field theory postulates that cultural value, like other collective beliefs, is a social product sustained by the practices of different actors; such as artists, their audiences and critics. In this respect, Bourdieu conceives of artistic value as a socio-historical product, rather than as an immanent quality of cultural objects and as a value universally shared across times and spaces. While values like 'creativity' and 'artistic genius' may be socially reproduced through educational institutions and turned into a 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1984), Bourdieu conceives of such beliefs as historical products emerging from the 'struggles' of concrete actors and institutions (Bourdieu 1996: 224-225). In this respect, the concept of cultural field has been considered useful in the study of the social production of knowledge more generally (Hesmondhalgh 2006, Eyal and Buchholz 2010).

### 3.1.1 *Positions, dispositions, capitals*

An important aspect of Bourdieu's theory is that it defines cultural fields as internally diversified social spaces. In this respect, the very existence of different producers and audiences represents a field's 'space of possibles' (Bourdieu 1996: 193-205). Within this space, new 'positions' – individuals, groups or organisations – need to take into account a pre-existing structure of positions and, more generally, the field's collective history. Put otherwise, new positions can implement their practices and define their identity only in relation to such pre-existing arrangements. In this respect, field theory presents a *relational* epistemology. Furthermore, for Bourdieu positions are differentiated according to their material, social and cultural resources, that is, according to the 'capitals' they possess. For Bourdieu, capital is not simply a material resource (e.g. economic capital). Indeed, cultural resources are key for the development of the 'symbolic autonomy' of cultural fields from other social fields. In this respect, while cultural capital is a kind of knowledge that is highly valued across different fields (Bourdieu 1984, Lamont and Lareau 1988), there are other forms of knowledge, defined as symbolic or field-specific capital (Bourdieu 1996: 124, Bourdieu 1993: 74-76), which are valuable only within specific fields. More generally, as long as fields, institutions and individuals are all conceived of as products of social histories and 'trajectories', they possess different capitals and 'properties', which in some cases may be 'converted'. For example, individuals may bring their resources into different fields, but their assets may not necessarily be recognised as capitals. As fields develop their own hierarchies and symbolic economies, they value different kinds of objects and knowledge.

The relational epistemology of field theory also extends to the relationships between different fields. Bourdieu has addressed this issue particularly in relation to the fields

of politics and economy, which he defines as the ‘field of power’ (Bourdieu 1996: 48-54). The different positions within a given field may be more or less ‘autonomous’ from the demands of these powers. More generally, the more a field develops a distinctive symbolic economy – with its own stakes and implicit rules – the more it becomes relatively autonomous from political and economic demands (*ibid.*, pp. 77-84). In this respect, Bourdieu employs the notion of field to conceptualise the relations between different institutions in modern societies. Such societies are made of a variety of semi-autonomous fields, which have their own internal logic and mediate external influences and demands in distinctive ways (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 97-98).

Overall, Bourdieu has developed a distinctive epistemology based on a relational view of social action. In this framework, any social practice results from a dialectic between the ‘dispositions’ of individuals (their ‘habitus’), and the positions available within the space of possibles of given fields. Both positions and dispositions are products of a history, and in this respect, Bourdieu defines social action as ‘the meeting of two histories’ (Bourdieu 1996: 256-258). The result of this meeting may generate either social reproduction or social change. In other words, people may contribute to the reproduction of existing power relationships, such as class and gender privileges; but they may also contribute to questioning or changing these arrangements. In this latter respect, cultural fields may change for a variety of reasons. On the one hand, the struggles that constitute fields secure a constant internal dynamism (Bourdieu 1996: 232). On the other hand, the structure of fields may be affected by broader and external changes (*ibid.*, pp. 252-256), like political breaks and changes in the social structure of society (e.g. demographic changes). Nevertheless, a sufficiently autonomous field is likely to mediate these changes in

distinctive ways. More generally, as long as people could go through complex social trajectories, they could develop ‘fuzzy’ dispositions (Bourdieu 1984: 154) and contribute to changing the structure of existing institutions and fields.

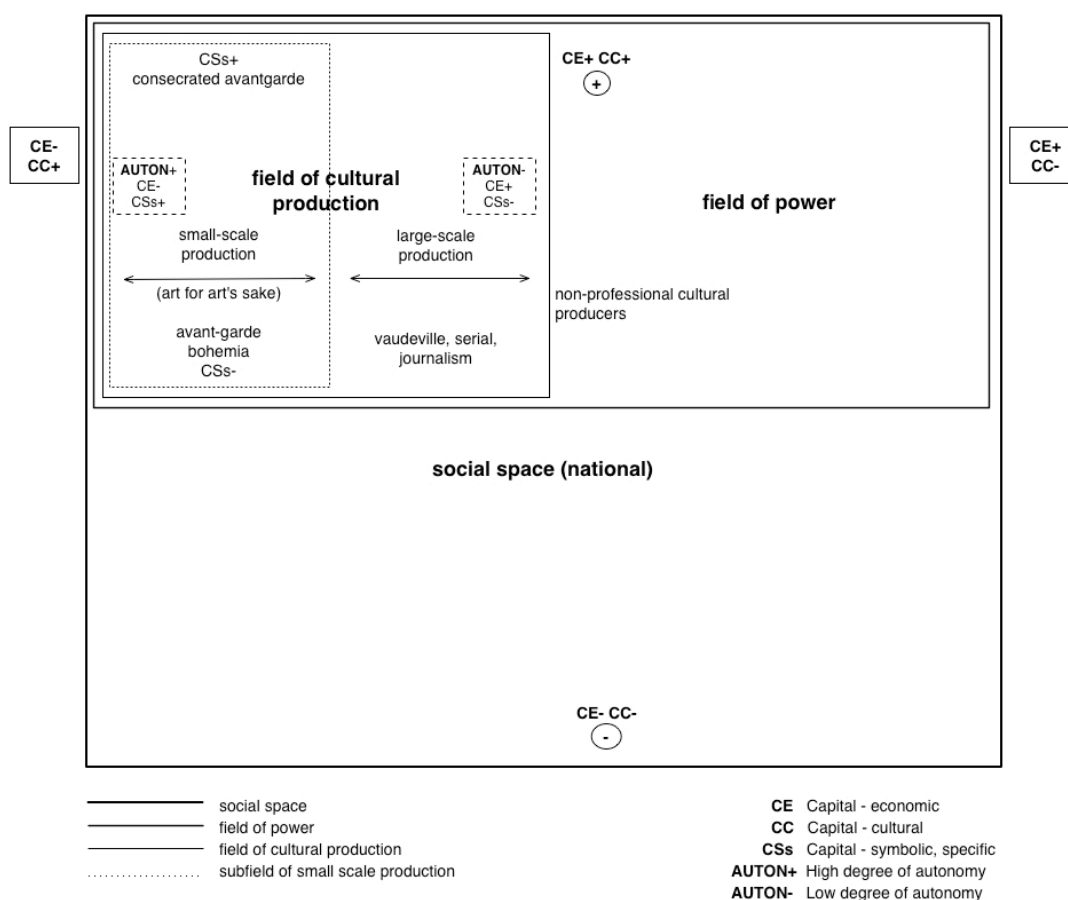
It is important to stress the role of social change within field theory since Bourdieu has been frequently framed as a scholar concerned exclusively with social reproduction (McCormick 2009, 2012), and it has been argued that his sociology of culture is unequipped to deal with questions of social change (Born 2010). However, these views seem to be based on a confusion between Bourdieu’s theoretical tool-kit and the findings produced by some of his major empirical projects. Indeed, while Bourdieu’s empirical research has dealt extensively with questions of social reproduction (Bourdieu 1984), his study of the French literary field is mostly a study about cultural and social change (see Bourdieu 1996: 47-112). As such, it represents a useful starting point to enquire about the emergence and diversification of cultural fields within and across different national contexts. Moreover, field theory makes it possible to address change and reproduction as empirical questions, rather than as normative statements about the social. This makes the concept particularly useful for the study of musical practices, especially if one considers the polarising views about issues of social change discussed in Chapter 2.

### *3.1.2 Diversification in cultural fields: large scale and small scale production*

While a field is defined as a social structure sustained by the relations among different actors, and while such relations are conceptualised as historically changing, Bourdieu provides also a more formalised typology of the ‘system’ of positions that constitute a field of cultural production. Within this schematisation (see **table 3.1**) the ‘large scale production’ is the space occupied by organisations with the highest

degree of economic capital and market success, and with the lowest degree of cultural and symbolic capital. On the contrary, the space of ‘small scale production’ is the region of the field where cultural producers are equipped mostly with cultural and symbolic capital.

**Table 3.1** The field of cultural production - adapted from Bourdieu (1996: 124)



This latter space constitutes what Bourdieu calls an ‘inverted’ economic world (Bourdieu 1996: 83; Bourdieu 1993: 29-73); that is, a social space in which artistic innovation and ‘symbolic autonomy’ from the market are the values mostly praised by cultural producers. In Bourdieu’s socio-historical study about the French literary field, for example, this position is occupied by writers struggling to define the

autonomy of literature from both political and economic demands. This was the position of writers like Gustave Flaubert, who praised an aesthetics of ‘art for the art’s sake’, which, as such, was not contaminated by external demands (Bourdieu 1996: 75). This schematisation shows that while Bourdieu conceptualises cultural fields as the result of historical and social processes, he employs the concept also to define an ideal-type of the ways in which the arts (i.e. high culture) are produced. This ideal-type is based on what Bourdieu considers a common feature of different cultural fields; namely the opposition between ‘commercial’ and ‘non-commercial’ art:

Because they are all organized around the same fundamental opposition as regards the relation to demand (that of the ‘commercial’ and the ‘non-commercial’), the fields of production and distribution of different species of cultural goods – painting, theatre, literature, music – are structurally and functionally homologous among themselves, and maintain, moreover, a relation of *structural homology* with the field of power, where the essential part of their clientele is recruited. (Bourdieu 1996: 161, my emphasis)

This scheme also stresses a specific set of ‘homologies’ between cultural producers, defined as positions within the field; and their audiences, that is positions within the ‘field of power’. Put otherwise, the relationship between producers and their audiences is conceptualised as a ‘pre-established harmony’ (*ibid.*) among members of the same social group. In this respect, Bourdieu’s schematisation of cultural fields stresses the structuring power of cultural and economic capital – resources, which, in his perspective, structure both cultural fields and society at large. Bourdieu’s national field of power is indeed stratified accordingly: social groups possessing neither



cultural nor economic capital are situated ‘at the bottom’ of society; by contrast, cultural production takes place where both material and symbolic resources are available. Cultural producers and their audience represent thus the ‘dominated’ fraction of the dominant class. In other words, they are framed as those members of the middle and upper-middle classes endowed with symbolic and cultural capital, but with relatively low economic capital (Bourdieu 1996: 251). I will now turn to some of the problems that this taxonomy poses for the empirical study of both criticism and musical practices, and more generally for the study of cultural fields that have emerged in a different socio-historical context than the French literary field studied by Bourdieu.

### *3.1.3 Limitations of field theory*

Field theory makes it possible to study forms of differentiation in cultural production and, more generally, it helps with mapping cultural production onto the social space at large. However, it also presents a number of shortcomings that may affect its application to popular music criticism and to the Italian context. First of all, it underestimates a range of social differences that may structure both society and cultural production, like age, gender and geographical location, to name a few which are particularly important to understand the Italian case (see Chapter 5). Secondly, the distinction between large and small scale production, while implying a necessary opposition between economic and cultural capital, downplays the actual relationships which may exist between cultural producers occupying different positions in the field (Hesmondhalgh 2006). Moreover, notwithstanding his critique of television (Bourdieu 1998), Bourdieu has devoted scant attention to the practices of large scale producers (Bolin 2009), and his conceptual opposition is blind to the subtler ways in

which market imperatives (and neo-liberal ideologies) may shape contemporary cultural production (Banks 2007). Nevertheless, his focus on producers pursuing artistic autonomy has been very influential on subsequent research about popular music and culture. The result, as I will show in the next section, is that many studies drawing on Bourdieu focus on avant-gardist or ‘alternative’ cultural producers, thus downplaying the comparative potential of the theory and re-inscribing Bourdieu’s predilection for the avant-gardes *within* popular culture.

More recently, cultural sociologists have put forward important critiques to Bourdieu’s work. For example, it has been argued that the concept of cultural capital ‘pre-determines’ the logic of power across different times and societies (Lamont and Thévenot 2000: 5; Lamont and Lareau 1988). In this respect, a now substantial literature on contemporary consumption practices has shown that the appreciation of high culture cannot be assumed as both a universal and uncontested form of cultural capital (see Wright 2010); and that educational attainment, social background and professional status are not the only social differences shaping consumption.<sup>3</sup> Other cultural sociologists, then, have criticised field theory’s high degree of abstraction. Born (2010) has argued that Bourdieu’s focus on ‘positions’ downplays the complexity of the concrete organisations and institutions occupying them, while Crossley and Bottero (2011) have criticised the notion of position as too abstract to analyse the social relationships and networks shaping cultural fields. As I will argue in the final section, a remedy to these problems is to reinscribe ‘practices’ and ‘strategies’ within field theory – a move that makes it possible to empirically address the operations through which cultural producers ‘make’ positions and, more generally, the material and symbolic labour through which they sustain cultural

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<sup>3</sup> See Bennett et al. (2009) for a thorough study of how differences such as gender and age shape different ‘fields of consumption’ in contemporary Britain.

fields. I now turn to the ways in which field theory has been used in studies about popular music and culture. I will argue that while downplaying the comparative potential of field theory, these studies have introduced a focus on social actors' practices and identities which makes field theory far less abstract than some of its critics suggest.

### **3.2 Researching the fields of (popular) music and culture**

Bourdieu has had a strong influence on some of the debates reviewed in the former chapters. As shown in Chapter 1, he has been responsible for an early theorisation of the role of critics within artistic fields, and his ideas about critics as key agents contributing to the legitimisation of cultural objects have inspired American research on the 'consecration' of popular culture. Similarly, Chapter 2 has shown that Bourdieu's work on consumption and inequality (1984) has informed the agenda of sociologists studying the relationships between music and practices of boundary-work. By and large, several scholars have employed field theory to research popular music and culture, and in many cases they have used it in innovative ways contributing to the theory's renewal (see below). However, these studies have also reproduced, to some extent, Bourdieu's own focus on cultural producers claiming symbolic autonomy from the market, thus leaving producers who are perceived as more 'commercial' out of the picture. Indeed, while contributing to correcting Bourdieu's simplistic account of popular culture (1984),<sup>4</sup> many studies focus on 'alternative' forms of music-making (Crossley and Bottero 2011, Prior 2008, Webb 2007), 'independent' music production (Hesmondhalgh 1998, Magaudda 2009) and, respectively, 'serious' and 'alternative' music criticism (Lindberg et al. 2005, Atton

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<sup>4</sup> See Bielby and Bielby (2004) for a discussion of Bourdieu's treatment of popular culture.

2009). Other studies have addressed actors struggling to claim the artistic value of popular music (Regev 1994; Santoro 2002, 2010b), while Thornton (1995) has employed the notion of cultural capital to study British clubbers who make distinctions between mainstream and underground club-cultures in order to display their 'subcultural capital'. To be sure, several scholars have highlighted the more complex conditions under which cultural production takes place nowadays, as producers pursuing artistic autonomy act within the context of market-driven media industries. Hesmondhalgh (1998), for example, has shown that while independence from major record companies is a key value for producers of dance music (and for the dance subculture), there are a variety of economic relationships linking the small labels producing dance with the music divisions of entertainment corporations. Similarly, Santoro and Solaroli (2007: 469) have shown that while the Italian singer-songwriter song (*canzone d'autore*) was supported as artistically valuable popular music by some cultural entrepreneurs, singer-songwriters were also a convenient investment for record companies since their albums had lower production costs. Nevertheless, Bourdieu's theory has been rarely employed in a comparative way to analyse the practices of different field actors, nor has it been used to analyse cultural producers nor companies explicitly concerned with market success. More specifically, there has been scant research on the ways in which market success is 'converted' into symbolic capital by those actors holding the market leadership of cultural fields. As I will argue in Chapter 5, this is a particularly significant question to understand Italian popular music criticism, partly because critics conceived of market structures as a preferable alternative to state control,<sup>5</sup> and partly because the magazine occupying the strongest economic position within the field (the weekly

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<sup>5</sup> In Italy, the government held the monopoly on broadcast frequencies up to the late 1970s. I will return to this question, and to its meaning for Italian critics, in Chapter 5.

*Ciao 2001*) used to frame its own success as a legitimate indicator of the ‘quality’ of its contents.

### *3.2.1 Exploring practices and identities*

While the aforementioned scholarship has problematised the structure of cultural fields as formalised by Bourdieu only to some extent, it has put the analysis of meaning and identity at the centre of its methodological strategies. For example, Webb (2007) has explored a series of avant-garde popular music scenes, providing thick descriptions of the aesthetic and political ideas emerging in such contexts, and looking at the meanings that (sub)cultural producers ascribe to their work. Furthermore, Lindberg et al. (2005) have explored the ‘field’ of American and British rock criticism through detailed descriptions of the authenticity claims made by emerging critics in relation to rock music and culture. On a similar note, Elafros (2012) has provided a very detailed account of the practices of DJs in Toronto, Canada. Drawing on Bourdieu and Swidler (1986), she has focused on DJs’ strategies of action vis-à-vis different spacial locations and audiences, thus introducing a micro level of analysis within field theory. Overall, these studies pay a great deal of attention to the actors’ practices, narratives and identities, thus addressing Bourdieu’s positions as complex social spaces *in themselves*. Although downplaying the critical stance of field theory,<sup>6</sup> these studies show that it may lead to more hermeneutically rich and meaning-centred explorations of cultural production, and that Bourdieu’s focus on structural differences, that is, differences in resources among cultural producers, may be integrated with the study of how they both mobilise and conceive of such resources. By and large, these examples provide

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<sup>6</sup> With a few exceptions (Thornton 1995, Lindberg et al 2005), questions of inequality and privilege are absent in these studies, which also ignore the relation between cultural fields and national social spaces (again with some exceptions; see Santoro 2010b).

important ground to rethink fields as *pragmatic accomplishments* – that is, as social spaces sustained by the ongoing symbolic and material labour of cultural producers and audiences. I will now turn to a set of theoretical contributions, which, sometimes contra Bourdieu, have addressed people's reflexive capacities and evaluative practices, thus informing my own reworking of field theory.

### **3.3 The sociology of valuations and evaluations**

The proposal of a 'sociology of valuations and evaluations' (hereafter SVE) has been recently made by Lamont (2012), who has both reviewed and reconceptualised a broad corpus of research about people's evaluative practices and everyday forms of critique.<sup>7</sup> More specifically, the SVE programme aims to focus on the criteria of evaluation mobilised by people and organisations across different situations, and on the practices and justifications through which such criteria are sustained. The concept of field is largely absent from this perspective, and the approaches discussed by Lamont have conceptualised (and operationalised) social context in significantly different ways. For example, Boltanski and Thévenot have stressed more contained spacial and temporal units: the 'situations' that force people to define shared criteria of evaluation and worth (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999). This research programme, also known as 'pragmatic sociology' (see Silber 2003), focuses on the arguments that people construct in order to establish agreement in situations that problematise shared understandings of 'common good' (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006: 12-14). In this respect, the pragmatic programme points to the 'critical capacities' of ordinary people (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999); capacities that are conceptualised as *not*

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<sup>7</sup> The discussion focuses on the contributions of Boltanski and Thévenot (1999, 2006), Lamont and Thévenot (2000), and Lamont (1992, 2002), since they provide both a critique of Bourdieu's sociology of culture, and a range of conceptual qualifications which I use to define the theoretical rationale of my research.

related to social differences (as in Bourdieu's framework). On the contrary, they are enabled by broader cultural structures ('orders of worth'), which people can mobilise across different situations and contexts.<sup>8</sup> This approach has been defined explicitly against Bourdieu, who is accused of underestimating people's reflexivity and capacities of social critique (Boltanski 2011: 20).<sup>9</sup> However, while introducing an important micro-perspective on people's reflexivity and argumentative strategies, the pragmatic programme does not present a definition of social space that goes beyond the situations that test people's critical capacities. As a result, it does not consider the mechanisms through which different social fields may enhance or prevent forms of reflexivity and critique. Put otherwise, the pragmatic programme does not pay attention to the impact of institutional and social differences on reflexive practices and on the very possibility of critique. This question has been partly addressed by Lamont (1992, 2000). She has proposed the concept of 'national-historical repertoire' to indicate how cultural resources are unequally distributed across nation-states, and reproduced by the work of local institutions such as the education system, the media and intellectual elites (Lamont 1992: 130). From this standpoint, Lamont has strongly criticised the centrality of cultural capital within Bourdieu's view of national societies. Through a series of comparative studies about the American and French upper-middle classes (Lamont 1992) and working classes (Lamont 2000), she has shown that people make distinctions according to a broad variety of cultural repertoires, and that both national and geographical position (i.e. living in urban centres rather than peripheries) are likely to provide different cultural resources for the construction of identity and the making of social distinctions. For example, she

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<sup>8</sup> I do not provide a full discussion of Boltanski and Thévenot's orders of worth, as it is beyond the scope of the thesis. See Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) and Boltanski (2011) for a full discussion of their conceptual apparatus.

<sup>9</sup> On Bourdieu's limited account of reflexivity see also Bottero (2010).

has shown that the American middle classes, contrary to their French counterparts, do not use the appreciation of high-culture as a cultural capital (Lamont 1992: 131). On the contrary, they draw distinctions on the basis of socio-economic and moral repertoires, for example praising ‘hard’ and ‘honest’ workers (*ibid.*, pp. 24-87). The key argument offered by Lamont is that different national contexts and spacial locations provide people with different cultural resources, which in turn are used to define different criteria of evaluation. While differences in social position (e.g. class, gender and ethnicity) may affect the access to national repertoires (in line with Bourdieu), Lamont has expanded Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic capital showing that people mobilise a broader range of resources to make meaningful distinctions and qualifications, rather than simply their educational capital. However, the limitations of this approach for the study of both cultural production and criticism stems from its exclusive focus on people’s everyday talk (collected through in-depth interviews). In this respect, Lamont’s research is less useful for addressing the historical genesis of evaluative repertoires and the institutions supporting them, and the concept of national-historical repertoire may be too broad to analyse the ways in which different social fields mediate the influence of national traditions. Furthermore, the notion of national-historical repertoire defines cultural resources in terms of intellectual traditions and narratives about people’s worth. By extension, I will show that a variety of national elements – like political and economic institutions, social movements and national media – may be employed as cultural resources in the arguments of critics. Put otherwise, while a nation’s social structure may affect the emergence of cultural fields in ways that go unnoticed by social actors (in line with Bourdieu), the national space and its institutions may also be ‘named’ and employed as narrative elements in order to construct contextually meaningful arguments – a



question to which I return in Section 4.

As I have discussed so far, the approaches stemming from the SVE focus on people's practices of evaluation and forms of critique, and have problematised, if not rejected, some tenets of Bourdieu's social epistemology. These studies have shown the importance of a broader range of cultural resources in people's everyday lives, and that cultural capital does not always play a central role in the making of meaningful social distinctions (Lamont 1992). Secondly, the SVE has paid more attention to people's critical capacities and reflexivity (Boltanski and Thévenot 1999), stressing the importance of negotiation and public justification in their everyday life. In this respect, it points towards detailed accounts of people's evaluations, and provides space for a consideration of the ways in which forms of reflexivity are enhanced or prevented by different social fields. As I discuss below, a focus on ongoing practices of evaluation and justification is not incompatible with field theory. Quite the reverse: it can enrich Bourdieu's socio-historical analysis of cultural fields, while retaining his attention to the ways in which social and institutional differences shape cultural practices.

### **3.4 Revising field theory: criticism as a pragmatic accomplishment**

In this section, I revise field theory for the study of cultural criticism. I propose considering fields as *pragmatic accomplishments* based on ongoing symbolic and material labour. More specifically, I argue that a closer inspection of the practices, narratives and identities of critics makes it possible to translate the SVE's insights about people's evaluative practices and critical capacities into empirical questions about the evaluations, boundary-work and public justifications that sustain criticism as a cultural field. From this vantage point, I will focus on the following avenues of

empirical research:

- The effects of global forces on the construction of national cultural fields and the way critics' national position informs their evaluative practices.
- Aesthetic experiences, and particularly music, as forces shaping both the habitus and evaluative practices of critics.
- The forms of reflexivity and critique enabled and prevented by different fields of practice.

#### *3.4.1 Practices and strategies*

In order to focus on critics' practices of evaluation and justification, it is necessary to adapt field theory to the study of smaller social processes, since the theory had been defined to study the genesis and structure of the French literary field across several decades (the years 1840-1880; Bourdieu 1996: 47-140). In this respect, I propose to reconsider fields from the vantage point of Bourdieu's notion of practice (1990).

Although this concept is not explicitly discussed in his work on cultural production, it presents the same relational epistemology discussed in the first section,<sup>10</sup> and as such can be easily employed to reframe field theory. More specifically, Bourdieu's practice theory shifts the analytical focus from positions, that is, the historical 'properties' of fields, to the ways in which social actors mobilise their resources in order to solve 'practical, historically situated problems' (*ibid.*, p. 96). In line with his epistemology, practices are conceptualised as arising from the 'meeting' between

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<sup>10</sup> See Lizardo (2011) for a discussion of practice theory vis-à-vis Bourdieu's work on cultural production and consumption. See also Warde (2004) for a discussion and critique of Bourdieu's practice theory.

people's dispositions and the historical properties of specific fields. However, practice theory emphasises the distinct activities that sustain the symbolic economy of fields (*ibid.*, pp. 112-121), and focus on the extent to which people's practices crystallise into relatively enduring 'strategies' (Bourdieu 1990: *passim*). The latter concept introduces an explicit focus on the temporal and historical dimension of practical activities (Bourdieu 1990: 98-111) and represents a useful corrective to the theoretical positions of the SVE, which have focused on situations and everyday talk rather than on enduring (and institutionalised) strategies of evaluation. Moreover, situating practices within broader fields, practice theory retains Bourdieu's relational epistemology. Indeed, practices are both enabled and constrained by a broader 'space of possibles' constituted by other actors and institutions – a space that, as I argue below, includes other fields as well (both at the national and global level).

From this theoretical stance, cultural criticism appears to be made by organisations and groups performing a variety of practices. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, a number of activities may be conceptualised in this way: the evaluation of cultural commodities (e.g. music, film and so on), forms of political critique and social commentary, the production of non-discursive data (charts, discographies), the interactions between critics and their audience, and so on. As these practices are relatively enduring, they can be analysed as strategies. This theoretical rationale allows for a comparative analysis of the strategies of different organisations (magazines, websites, blogs), and makes it possible to address criticism as a socially and historically embedded field of practices. More generally, a focus on practices and strategies enables an analysis of the making and 'remaking' of positions, and makes it possible to focus on the activities and resources employed by critics in order to sustain the field. From this standpoint, field theory's analytical focus shifts from

the changing structure of a field across several decades – the macro level of analysis – to the enduring operations and discourses that both sustain and transform the field. In other words, focusing on practices and strategies (and by extension narratives) means looking at fields as *pragmatic accomplishments* that are constantly ‘in the making’ (Ferguson 1998), rather than as slowly changing socio-historical structures.

### 3.4.2 *A broader space of possibles: the national and the global*

As discussed in this chapter's first section, one premise of field theory is that the cultural field occupies a clear position within the national social space – one defined in terms of distribution of capitals. Indeed, according to Bourdieu, a relatively autonomous cultural field can be sustained only by people endowed with a high degree of cultural capital as well as sufficient economic capital. There are two aspects of this conceptualisation that require revision. Firstly, as already argued, it differentiates social space along the lines of economic and cultural capital, and thus it does not account for other social differences – such as gender, ethnicity and age – and their impact on cultural practices (Bennett et al. 2009). Secondly, it does not address the way in which the national space shapes the ‘categories of perception’ (Bourdieu 1996) of cultural producers. Put otherwise, Bourdieu does not focus on the ways in which cultural producers employ the national and historical context as *frame of reference* to justify their purposes as well as the stakes and symbolic boundaries of cultural fields. As I will show in Chapters 5 and 6, the practices of Italian music critics were embedded in a national space that was meaningful to them and their readers as well. Music critics made references to a variety of nationally and historically specific actors in order to contextualise their evaluations and to claim the value of popular music criticism as a new practice. Moreover, the way critics

positioned themselves within the national space is deeply entwined with how they perceived the global, that is, Italy's position within the global musical field. As Chapter 5 will argue, the experience of a transnational pop-rock culture during the 1960s significantly shaped critics' habitus and cultural dispositions, thus informing how they defined the autonomy of popular music criticism during the 1970s. To be sure, a focus on the national position of cultural producers does not undermine the epistemological premises of field theory, as critics' experience of the national was embedded in their social trajectory as educated middle-class and upper-middle class young people. By corollary, it does not undermine the institutional diversity highlighted by the theory. Indeed, despite defining shared stakes and commitments (Chapter 5), music critics operated within magazines with radically different aims (Chapter 6). In line with the approach defined so far, thus, I propose conceptualising the national-historical space as a *broader* space of possibles. While Bourdieu employs this concept to define the system of positions within a cultural field, that is, a social structure that newcomers have to 'face' in order to develop their position, I propose to expand its spacial range to identify the broader national (and by extension global) space faced by critics – a space which they may employ to conceptualise their position and to justify their practices. Further, in line with Bourdieu's epistemology, I conceive of critics' accounts about the national and the global as depending on their orientations as cultural producers. In other words, they provide a 'view' of the national space that depends on their position within the field of criticism as well as their social trajectory. They make narratives about the national-global nexus, rather than comprehensive or 'objective' accounts. In this respect, a field perspective makes it possible to compare the ways in which critics working for different organisations employ the national space as a frame of reference.

### 3.4.3 Putting music into criticism: the meeting of two histories

To address criticism as a field of practices also means acknowledging that it is both an internally diversified social space, and a space relatively autonomous from fields of cultural production. In other words, critics can have both different and competing orientations toward cultural producers, as they are part of groups and media organisations pursuing different aims. In this respect, to conceptualise criticism as a field means enquiring about the *evaluative positions* that critics assume in relation to musicians, their work and the cultural classifications, such as music genres, organising the musical discourse. As Chapter 1 has shown, studies on cultural and music criticism have underestimated the ways critics make distinctions within popular music and between different genres. To conceptualise cultural criticism as a diversified and relatively autonomous field makes it possible to address this question. Further, it allows for a consideration of the aesthetic autonomy of music. As shown by Chapter 2, music studies have focused either on music's autonomy and social power, or on the way social and institutional differences shape discourses and practices concerning music. By contrast, conceiving of criticism as a field makes it possible to study musical evaluation as an *encounter* between two histories: on the one hand, critics having a distinctive social biography and occupying different institutional positions; on the other hand, musics endowed with different sonic properties (DeNora 2000, Hennion 2008) as well as cultural and socio-historical connotations (DeNora 2000, Fabbri 1996). Here I draw on the more sociological strand of genre theory, which has considered genres as socio-historical products subject to historical change (Peterson and Lena 2008), and critics as actors struggling over the meaning of genres along with producers and consumers (DiMaggio 1987, Santoro 2002). From this standpoint, music genres are conceptualised as relatively

autonomous from the evaluations of critics (DiMaggio 1987, Frith 1998). They are not entirely ‘constructed’ by critics, but are socio-historical classifications (albeit contested ones) that are part of the affordances provided by music (DeNora 2000). This conceptualisation is compatible with the Bourdieusian framework outlined so far. Although Bourdieu has focused exclusively on the properties of actors and institutions, the idea that music is endowed with its own properties, and that they may shape the evaluations of critics, is compatible with his relational epistemology.<sup>11</sup> As argued in Chapter 2, then, a revised Bourdieusian framework may better account for differences in people’s attitudes towards different music genres.<sup>12</sup> Chapter 7 will explore this question showing that the way in which Italian critics evaluated genres like rock, jazz and soul was shaped by their national and institutional position, but also by music itself. Indeed, they did not treat all music genres in the same way, but recognised and evaluated their specific properties.

#### *3.4.4 From homology to reflexivity: critics and their audience*

As argued in Chapter 1, studies of cultural criticism have paid only occasional attention to the reception of criticism and, more generally, to their audience (Blank 2007). Further, field theory conceptualises the relationship between producers and consumers in a way that makes an investigation of these issues problematic. As discussed in this chapter's first section, for Bourdieu, there exists a structural homology between producers occupying a specific position within cultural fields and their audience; a pre-established harmony grounded in the fact that they share a

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<sup>11</sup> To be sure, DeNora's perspective is deeply relational in itself. Indeed, she argues that music's meaning always emerges as a co-production involving music and social actors as well (see Chapter 2). As a result, her perspective can be easily integrated with field theory.

<sup>12</sup> As suggested also by Prior (2011), Bourdieu’s sociology of culture may contribute to balancing the emphasis of music sociologists (particularly DeNora and Hennion) on music’s autonomy from other social structures.

similar social position within the field of power. This perspective seems to frame as irrelevant both the meanings that readers ascribe to the work of critics, and the representation that critics construct of their audience. However, the theoretical rationale outlined so far leads to a different route for the study of these questions. In this respect, Chapter 8 will explore the meanings that readers ascribed to different magazines (and the cultural projects they embodied) analysing both the letters they sent to music magazines, and the ways in which letters were mediated by critics. As the publication of readers' letters was an established practice within the Italian music press, it must be addressed both to understand its function within the field, and to consider how it problematises Bourdieu's understanding of the producer-consumer relationship. To be sure, readers' letters represent a highly mediated response to criticism, as they are subject to the mediation of editorial boards (a question which I will address in Chapter 8). They cannot be taken as transparent representations of the way readers received or 'used' music magazines. Moreover, writing a letter is a very specific form of engagement with criticism – one that is likely to be chosen only by some readers. Nevertheless, letters are an invaluable source of detailed narratives about the social significance of music magazines from the readers' perspective. Moreover, they were used by critics themselves as an occasion to justify and negotiate the institutional choices of magazines. As Chapter 8 will argue, discussions with readers had an important ideological meaning for music critics, as they made it possible to frame the popular music press as a 'democratic' site of discussion and to distinguish it from more elitist (i.e. highbrow) forms of cultural criticism. From a theoretical point of view, the study of readers' letters makes it possible to revise field theory in two respects. First, it shows that critics had to justify their choices vis-à-vis the demands of readers in order to sustain the credibility of



magazines and popular music criticism at large. Rather than being a pre-established harmony, the relationship between critics and readers was actively constructed and negotiated: it demanded ongoing labour and commitment from the part of critics. Second, readers and critics used to *explicitly* discuss their social position and, more generally, the social differences shaping both the music press and Italian society at large. In this respect, music magazines acted as *technologies of reflexivity*, as they enhanced reflections about the asymmetries and social privileges shaping the youth culture (that is, the audience of magazines), as well as the relationship between critics and readers. What emerges from Chapter 8, then, is significantly different from Bourdieu's view of reflexivity as occurring under exceptional conditions of personal or collective crisis (Bourdieu 1990, Bottero 2010). Indeed, readers were able to recognise and critique existing power relationships.<sup>13</sup> This suggests, more generally, that cultural fields may enhance distinctive forms of reflexivity and 'sociological imagination' (Wright Mills 1959) among producers and consumers. While the existence of these reflexive practices is an empirical question to be addressed case by case, the Italian case shows that it is possible to integrate the concern of the SVE programme for the reflexivity of social actors within a field perspective. Conversely, a field perspective makes it possible to consider the *limitations* of reflexive practices. In this respect, while Italian music magazines enhanced broader reflections about the social inequalities shaping the youth culture, the conversations between critics and readers were shaped by the magazines' institutional agenda. This agenda informed both the choice of letters that were published, and the ways in which critics framed the interventions of readers. More specifically, critics used to promote some topics of discussion and styles of

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<sup>13</sup> This was also due to the fact that the audience of popular music magazines was socially diverse (see Chapters 5 and 8). As a result, *complete* homology between critics and readers was not possible, albeit they shared a relatively similar musical and generational culture.

intervention, while stigmatising others. In this respect, a revised field theory helps to enquire about the mediated nature of these interactions without necessarily constructing social actors as unable to form a critique and reflect on the conditions under which they consume both music and criticism.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined the theoretical rationale for my research about Italian music criticism. More specifically, I have introduced Bourdieu's field theory and have discussed how it has been revised in order to study the practices of popular music critics. Finally, I have defined some lines of research that will be empirically explored in the subsequent chapters about the Italian popular music press. Overall, the framework outlined proposes a more practice-centred notion of field – one that focuses on the activities, narratives and identities of cultural producers (and their audiences), and which approaches fields as pragmatic accomplishments to be sustained through ongoing labour. From this vantage point, the chapter has outlined three avenues of research that will be empirically explored from Chapter 5 to Chapter 8. These lines of research pertain to the impact of global forces and national structures on critics' practices; the role of music and, more generally, aesthetic experiences as active forces shaping the social life of fields; and the forms of reflexivity enhanced and prevented by historically specific fields. The next chapter will discuss the ways in which the theoretical perspective outlined here has been operationalised in terms of sampling and methods of analysis.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology and fieldwork**

This chapter discusses the methodological choices of the research vis-à-vis the theoretical framework outlined in the former chapter. I will focus on the ways in which the notion of field (Bourdieu 1993, 1996) and the theoretical tool-kit defined in Chapter 3 have been operationalised. More generally, in line with Bourdieu's reflexive sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), I will consider the choices through which I 'constructed' the practices of Italian music critics as an object of enquiry.

The discussion will proceed as follows. I will first discuss the use of music magazines as primary data, the use of secondary sources and, more generally, the role of historical research within the methodology. I will then discuss the choice of 1970s Italy as a distinctive national-historical context, and the strategies devised to sample different magazines and practices. A good deal of discussion will be devoted to sampling strategies. Indeed, the fieldwork required sampling choices to be taken at various stages of the research. Further, I will discuss the use of discourse analysis and thematic analysis as methods to address critics' practices. The chapter will conclude considering the use of the software NVivo to handle the data and the place of translation within the methodology.

#### **4.1 Archival research and music magazines**

The fieldwork for this study is based on archival work. More specifically, the research employs music magazines as primary data and draws on a range of secondary sources in order to situate critics' evaluative practices within a broader

socio-historical context. Secondary sources include social histories containing qualitative and quantitative data about the major trends shaping post-war Italy (e.g. Ginsborg 1990, Cavalli and Leccardi 1997); biographies of the critics working for the magazines under study;<sup>1</sup> quantitative data about the audience of music magazines (which I discuss in Chapter 5); and posthumous narratives about the popular music press provided both by critics and other people involved with the popular music cultures of the 1970s. The archival research took place between November 2011 and October 2012 in three public libraries: *Accademia di Brera* (Milan), *Biblioteca Sormani* (Milan) and *Biblioteca Nazionale* (Florence). Their archives provide access to complete collections of the three magazines on which the research is based (see below).<sup>2</sup> While the existence of these collections made it possible to design a study of the evaluative practices of critics, the existence of a broad range of secondary sources allowed for the integration of social history – the tenet of field theory – and qualitative methods like discourse analysis and thematic analysis. As a result, I could combine a focus on critics' evaluative repertoire with a social history of the music press as a field. The magazines themselves have been employed to collect data about their own organisational structure, ownership and about their audience, alongside analysing their contents. Put otherwise, magazines have been approached both as documents delivering public discourses and identities (Atkinson and Coffey 2004), and as materials providing information about the organisations producing such representations (Prior 2004).<sup>3</sup> More generally, I adopted a reflexive approach to the

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for a list of sources. The data concerning critics' biographies (34) are discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>2</sup> The only exception are four issues of the magazine *Gong* published in 1977, three of which have been collected via eBay.

<sup>3</sup> In this respect, magazines contain useful information for a social history of the music press (e.g. name, position and gender of employees; location of editorial boards; professional links with advertising and distribution companies and so on). I discuss some of these data in Chapter 5. However, they cannot be used as a proxy for studying organisational routines and production practices

study of magazines as documents (Altheide 2008), focusing on the ways in which they are organised and structured as well as on their discursive repertoires. As I will discuss below, this made possible more informed choices of sampling and analysis.

#### **4.2 The role of reflexivity in field theory**

Field theory has informed some of the preliminary choices of sampling and analysis. However, while conducting the fieldwork, I introduced a focus on evaluative practices and revised some of the theory's conceptual tools (as discussed in Chapter 3). This circularity between theory and empirical research is inspired by Bourdieu's idea of reflexive sociology (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The meaning of reflexivity as conceived by Bourdieu is significantly different from the ways in which this concept is defined in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers have characteristically stressed self-reflexivity and the researcher's autobiographical position as a way to recognise (and possibly challenge) the imbalances of power between researcher and participants (Adkins 2002, Skeggs 2002). Bourdieu, by contrast, has been mostly concerned with problematising the categories and theoretical assumptions of scholars, and more generally the institutional position from which scholars make sense of other social fields. From this standpoint, reflexivity implies a specific relationship between theory and data analysis. The researcher employs a set of theoretical concepts to engage with the social world under exploration. At the same time, engagement and progressive familiarisation with the categories and taxonomies of social actors force the researcher to revise her/his initial assumptions. This process – also defined as 'participant objectification' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 253-260) – is based on the idea that social actors'

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(Atkinson and Coffey 2004: 58), which are beyond the thesis' scope.

categories of perception need to be addressed through a meta-language that puts them into perspective. Conversely, theoretical abstractions need to be ‘grounded’ in such categories; they need to be sensitised to (or ‘moved’ by) the data (*ibid.*, p. 228). Field theory is strongly related to this research process. Indeed, it aims to produce an ‘objectified’ map of the positions, relationships and conflicts animating a social field, rather than privileging the perspective of a specific position. In this respect, field theory produces a break with the subjective positions of actors, mapping them onto a broader system of relationships, and producing a relative ‘distance’ between researcher and researched. However, since the researcher has to reconstruct a social field engaging with its symbolic economy, familiarisation with the categories and stakes of the field foster her/his reflexivity on pre-constituted theoretical assumptions (*ibid.*, p. 235-36). The underlying argument, then, is that scholars do not have to impose their own categories of perception on other fields, since such categories are themselves a social product of academic dispositions and habits.<sup>4</sup>

This model has informed my choices of sampling and analysis in several respects. I have used the concepts of field and ‘position’ to make preliminary choices of sampling and to approach the secondary sources. At the same time, the work on primary sources (music magazines) has made me familiar with critics' categories of perception, as well as with the narratives supported by different magazines. This fostered a reconsideration of field theory and a focus on different practices of evaluation. Deeper familiarity with the research context and its language, then, has made possible more informed choices of sampling and analysis.

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<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Bourdieu ascribes a significant power to the researcher, to her/his reflexive capacities vis-à-vis those of other actors (Boltanski 2009: 1-49), and to his own ‘critical’ sociology vis-à-vis other traditions. However, as argued by other scholars, one can critically work ‘with’ Bourdieu (Lamont 2012, Santoro 2011) without necessarily taking for granted (or agreeing with) the most normative aspects of his epistemology.

### 4.3 Sampling strategy

#### 4.3.1 Historical rationale: 1970s Italy

This historical frame has been chosen for a variety of reasons. First of all, it made it possible to study the emergence of popular music criticism as a new cultural field. Indeed, it is from the late 1960s onwards that the popular music press emerged as a sufficiently autonomous and diversified field in Italy. The focus on these years, then, enabled the study of a cultural field ‘in the making’ (Ferguson 1998), and thus it made it possible to study the ways in which critics struggled to define the meaning of a newly established social practice. Furthermore, the music press became a key mediator of British and American popular music during the same years. The chosen historical frame, in this respect, has enabled an exploration of the cultural taxonomies and practices of distinction in which different popular music genres became embedded.

Doing further research about the musical culture of the 1970s, the years between 1973 and 1977 have emerged as a suitable sample of years for studying the popular music press. These years present a variety of actors practising popular music criticism. As a result, they made it possible to compare the strategies of magazines occupying different positions and to explore how their orientations shaped the reception of ‘new’ popular music genres. More generally, it is from the late 1960s onwards that popular music, in Italy, started being defined as artistically valuable by some cultural entrepreneurs and critics. In this respect, notions of authorship, and a romantic ideology praising the aesthetic qualities of songs, were mobilised to define a new genre of popular song – the so-called *canzone d'autore* – as superior to Italian ‘light’ music (Santoro 2002, 2010b; Tomatis 2010). The historical frame of the

research, thus, has made it possible to explore how critics working for specialised music magazines participated in this broader process of cultural legitimisation, and which genres became the object of their evaluative discourses.

The historical frame presents further opportunities to the research. While 1970s Italian music criticism shows some of the features of American and British rock criticism – namely a young readership and a predilection for pop-rock music<sup>5</sup> – it also presents important differences. First, Italian music magazines addressed a broader variety of music genres than rock; which includes jazz, forms of ‘folk revival’, soul music and, in some cases, classical music.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Italian popular music criticism was not defined primarily as ‘rock criticism’, but as a new form of cultural and socio-political criticism (Prato 1988, 1995). This peculiarity makes the years 1973-1977 particularly appealing for an exploration of the ways in which critics defined differences between and within music genres. As argued in Chapter 1, this question has been rarely addressed by the sociology of criticism.

The years 1973-1977, and more generally Italy between the late 1960s and late 1970s, also present a distinctive political situation, which makes an analysis of the ways music critics mobilise the national-historical context in their evaluations more salient. While this political context will be discussed more in detail by Chapter 6, here I provide a preliminary description in order to highlight the opportunities that it provided to the research. Several studies have stressed the politically charged character of cultural production and consumption in 1970s Italy (Fiori 1984, Forgacs 1990: 130-151, Colombo 1998: 253-260). More generally, the years between 1967

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<sup>5</sup> These features were common to the pop-rock press emerging in other national contexts during the same years. See for example Pires (2003) on the case of France.

<sup>6</sup> This was not the case for American rock criticism. In this respect, Brennan (2006: 276) argues that between 1967 and 1969 ‘the founders of the early rock magazines not only distinguished themselves from the music trade press and teen music magazines, but also from the established world of jazz criticism’.



and 1978 witnessed the emergence of social movements and political organisations broadly situated on the left of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) – organisations which fostered activism in different sectors of the labour market and civil society (Ginsborg 1990: 298-404). These groups gained support among students and young workers, and formed a ‘movement’ (*il movimento*) which, among other things, became active in the organisation of cultural events. In the same years, the PCI was similarly involved with the cultural arena, providing a network of venues for popular musicians and competing effectively with professional concert organisers (Gundle 2000: 141). These *overlaps* between the fields of music and politics were supported by broader social and cultural factors. On the one hand, the political ideologies that emerged during the 1968 upheavals stressed the primacy of political engagement (*impegno*) on other social practices (Passerini 1988), and while this view was strongly criticised throughout the 1970s (most notably by the Feminist movement), it continued to inform the practices of activists. On the other hand, the movement of the 1970s included a range of cultural organisations (known as ‘the underground’), which developed a strong anti-capitalist ethos, and which advocated for the dismantling of the cultural industry in favour of grass-roots forms of cultural organisation (Echaurren and Salaris 1999). As a result, during the 1970s the idea of a professionalised musical production, which could be *entirely autonomous* from political purposes, was explicitly contested by different organisations, and while activists in these groups were a minority of the 1970s youth culture, they became a point of reference for the broader youth movement (Gundle 2000: 154-158). It was in relation to this context that the Italian popular music press was socially constructed between 1973 and 1977. More specifically, music critics constructed their professional identity vis-à-vis the movement and the practices of its groups, while

some magazines defined themselves as ‘political’ projects tout court (see Chapter 6).<sup>7</sup> The historical context, thus, offers the research the opportunity to analyse the relationships between music criticism and political activism, and to explore the ways in which this ‘unsettled’ political context (Swidler 1986) informed the categories of perception and strategies of critics.

#### 4.3.2 *Sampling music magazines*

I have employed several secondary sources to identify the positions constituting the 1970s music press and to generate a sample of magazines to be used as case studies. The research focuses on three publications: the magazines *Ciao 2001* (1969-1998), *Muzak* (1973-1976) and *Gong* (1974-1978). *Ciao 2001* was a weekly publication established in 1969 as a new ‘teen’ magazine. However, during the early 1970s it focused increasingly on pop-rock music, and eventually the magazine gained the economic leadership of the field between the early 1970s and early 1980s (Rusconi 1976, Gaspari 1981: 88-89, Casiraghi 2005: 225). In this respect, *Ciao 2001* appeared as a good example of ‘heteronomy’ from the perspective of field theory, albeit the research has revealed that it held a more complex position both within the musical field and within the landscape of Italian media (see Chapter 5). The other publications sampled, *Muzak* and *Gong*, are two monthly magazines that were established as an alternative to *Ciao 2001*, thus contributing to the diversification of the field. These magazines were set up by the same network of people living in Rome and Milan, with *Gong* being launched in October 1974 as result of a ‘split’ within the editorial board of *Muzak* (see Chapter 6). I have worked on both magazines since they engendered a symbolic struggle over the purposes of popular

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<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, according to Lindberg and colleagues (2005: 188-191) the field of American rock criticism was defined as autonomous from political countercultures from the late 1960s onward.

music criticism, hence contributing to changing the symbolic economy of the field. Moreover, both magazines were established and dismantled within the years under study,<sup>8</sup> which made it possible to examine their whole social trajectory between 1973 and 1977.

These three magazines have been selected as case studies at an earlier stage of the research and on the basis of secondary sources. These sources give relatively succinct information about the magazines, hence they do not provide sufficient material to reconstruct the whole field of relationships in which they were inscribed. Further, some of them provide strong assessments about the historical and ‘intellectual’ significance of music magazines. In this respect, they distribute posthumous recognition and symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu (1996: 70-71) this is what usually happens with the past of cultural fields: while some positions are consecrated – and therefore ‘made history’ – others are ignored or devalued. Secondary sources, then, ‘reposition’ the actors of the field in light of the present. In order to address this problem, I have sampled the magazines adapting the strategy of Lindberg and colleagues (2005), who employed secondary data to make similar decisions about the study of American and British music magazines. While the authors sampled only actors that secondary sources framed as prestigious (i.e. critics and magazines defined as culturally relevant), I have considered also actors which did not gain a similar title. In this respect, *Muzak* and *Gong* were defined as ‘alternative’ (Prato 1988: 77), ‘charismatic’ (Prato 1995: 135), and more generally as culturally more significant than *Ciao 2001* (Guglielmi 2011: 18-19; Barbieri 2001: 122). By contrast, *Ciao 2001* was framed as a ‘generalist’ (Sibilla 2003: 222) and

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<sup>8</sup> Although *Gong* was published until December 1978, the magazine changed owners during April-July 1977 and, after October, it changed editorial board as well. This led to a strong refashioning of the magazine’s identity. The research, covering the issues published until October 1977, addresses only the early incarnation of the magazine.

‘paternalistic’ magazine (Prato 1995: 131), and as a publication which passively followed the trends imposed by the recording industry (Carrera 1980: 208; Angelini and Gentile 1977: 16). *Ciao 2001*, thus, has been included in the sample in order to compare different positions. More generally, I have used field theory’s distinction between autonomous and heteronomous actors to sample magazines that, according to the secondary sources, embodied different properties.<sup>9</sup> Since these differences result from the accounts of fans, historians and other scholars, they have been simply taken as a starting point for a more detailed investigation. Indeed, the fieldwork has revealed a more complex picture about the dynamics shaping the field and the positions of such magazines, showing that it was problematic to hold a too straightforward distinction between artistic autonomy and market heteronomy (see Chapter 5). Further, while these magazines defined relatively enduring and coherent positions, they performed a variety of activities that could not be reduced to the evaluation of music. This is why I have introduced a focus on practices within the research design, which has required appropriate sampling and analysis procedures.

#### *4.3.3 Sampling practices*

In order to better explore the ways in which critics made sense of their work and justified its social value, I had initially defined a sampling strategy based on three different editorial formats: music-related articles, editorial pieces and readers’ letters. However, this preliminary classification has been revised during the fieldwork in order to focus on evaluative practices which could not be entirely reduced to distinct editorial formats. In this respect, the sampling strategy for each practice has been

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<sup>9</sup> The choice of magazines was also related to some practical considerations. For all the magazines discussed, it was possible to work on complete collections that did not present difficulties of access. On the contrary, other magazines active in the same years (see Casiraghi 2005: 225-265) are either difficult to access or missing from public archives.

shaped by a reflexive engagement with the magazines as documents (Altheide 1987) and by the tenets of Bourdieu's reflexive sociology.

#### 4.3.3.1 *Music coverage and music genres*

Italian magazines used to evaluate music through two different editorial formats: features and reviews. The former are long pieces about musicians, bands or music trends, which gain high visibility on the magazines' tables of contents. By contrast, reviews are short evaluative pieces published in sections entirely devoted to this format. While review sections are usually indicated on tables of contents, the musicians and bands reviewed are not. I chose to focus the study of music's evaluation only on the analysis of features because they indicate stronger choices of coverage than reviews. Further, they present more elaborate evaluative discourses and are used also to evaluate whole music trends. As a result, they appeared to be a better choice to reconstruct the magazines' strategies of coverage and orientations towards different music genres. Moreover, since the review sections of *Ciao 2001*, *Muzak* and *Gong* were organised in different ways, features were easier to compare across magazines.<sup>10</sup>

Further sampling choices have been taken in order to include different music genres within the sample. As partly discussed in Chapter 3, categories of genre are neither immanent qualities of music (Frith 1998: 75-95; Fabbri 1996: 7-41), nor are they categories universally shared by social actors (Santoro 2002). Indeed, genres are cultural classifications whose meanings and boundaries may be differently established by audiences, producers and critics (DiMaggio 1987). For Bourdieu, then, cultural classifications are the very object of the struggles taking place within

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<sup>10</sup> The reviews published by *Ciao 2001* until December 1976 were all written by the same critic (Enzo Caffarelli), while the review sections of *Muzak* and *Gong* were managed by more people. For *Ciao 2001*, thus, reviews would have provided a biased sample.

cultural fields (1996: 222-223). As a result, I have paid attention to the ways in which critics themselves defined musical categories and struggled over their meaning. After having analysed a purposive sample of articles through discourse analysis,<sup>11</sup> I discovered that magazines used to classify popular music through some main distinctions around which I could organise the overall sampling strategy. In this respect, pop music (*musica pop*)<sup>12</sup> and jazz were clearly identified as different genres, despite the identification of sub-categories (e.g. jazz-rock) and musicians that could problematise such a distinction (e.g. the case of some British and Italian ‘progressive’ bands). Further, these distinctions were supported by the organisational routines of magazines. For example, jazz acts were usually assigned to fewer critics specialising in this genre (see below). At a later stage of the fieldwork I broadened the sample to include soul music and the folk revival; two genres, which, unlike pop and jazz, were initially not covered by the magazines. They started being covered only from 1975 (soul) and 1974 (folk). Since critics had to justify the inclusion of these trends to their readers, they provided a convenient case to analyse the ways in which magazines redefined their positions, and to further enquire about how they conceptualised the distinctions between different popular music genres (see Chapter 7).<sup>13</sup>

For each genre I sampled at least one article published every two months in *Muzak* and *Gong*, and one published every four-five weeks in *Ciao 2001*. This procedure generated a sample of 297 features.<sup>14</sup> In this way I was able to ‘track’ the discourse about specific genres (Altheide 2000), and to identify both continuities and changes

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<sup>11</sup> Methods are discussed in Section 4.

<sup>12</sup> Unlike their American and British counterparts, Italian critics did not organise their evaluations around the opposition between ‘pop’ and ‘rock’ (Frith 1983, Lindberg et al. 2005: 338). Instead, pop music (sometimes called rock) was defined in contrast to Italian ‘light’ music (*musica leggera*). See also Chapters 5 and 7.

<sup>13</sup> For reasons of space, the discussion of folk music articles has been excluded by the thesis.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 7 for the sample's distribution across different magazines and genres.

in the magazines' strategies. The sampling was thus purposive, and produced 'redundant' evaluative narratives. While applying this procedure I also took into account the organisation of magazines. For example, while jazz and folk music were usually assigned to one critic, pop music and soul were addressed by a higher number of people. As a result, for the latter, I sampled articles written by at least three critics in order to avoid overrepresenting the views of some individuals. My aim was to identify the strategies of evaluation that magazines implemented for different genres, not to focus on individual aesthetic inclinations. Articles about both male and female musicians, and about 'black' (i.e. African-American) and 'white' musicians, were also sampled to address gender and ethnicity as potential categories of evaluation,<sup>15</sup> as other research has shown that they may affect the discourse of critics (Davies 2001, Schmutz and Faupel 2010). This choice has revealed that they significantly shaped critics' evaluations. As Chapter 7 will argue, gender and ethnicity were part of the social connotations which critics ascribed to some music genres, and as such could be used to define the meaning (and value) of certain pieces of music (DeNora 2000: 45). For example, the 'blackness' of some musicians became a distinctive feature of American contemporaneous jazz for *Muzak* and *Gong*, while women's attractiveness became a defining feature of their value as musicians.

#### 4.3.3.2 *From editorials to position-takings*

While all the magazines under study used to publish editorial pieces, they used to define their cultural politics through various editorial formats and in relation to a broad range of topics. For example, critics used events taking place both within the

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<sup>15</sup> The sample also includes women critics, albeit very few women worked as music critics for both *Ciao* 2001, *Muzak* and *Gong* (see Chapters 5 and 7).

musical field and Italian society at large as occasions to define their public identity. Social and political commentary, then, was a practice through which Italian critics could define the purposes and symbolic boundaries of the field. In order to study this particular practice, it was not sufficient to limit the analysis to one editorial format (such as editorials). As a result, I applied a strategy of theoretical sampling based on Bourdieu's notion of 'position-taking'. For Bourdieu position-takings are 'manifestations' of the actors constituting a cultural field, which may take the form of 'political acts or pronouncements, manifestos or polemics' (1993: 30). Drawing on this definition I sampled an initial group of articles addressing a variety of questions in order to identify the issues for which magazines expressed concern. I found that they used to take positions especially on the politics of other institutions dealing with the production, mediation and organisation of music. These institutions include political actors (e.g. the Communist Party and other political groups), regional and local bodies, and the RAI (the state-owned company holding the monopoly of radio and television broadcasting).<sup>16</sup> Music critics defined their expertise and professional identity in relation to such actors, thus establishing (and justifying) the symbolic boundaries between popular music criticism and other social fields. Focusing on position-takings, and using the concept to construct the sample, I was able to identify the 'broader' space of possible in relation to which critics constructed the popular music press as a new cultural space (see Chapter 3). In this respect, the system of relationships shaping the music press did include a diverse network of actors. From this standpoint, position-takings can be defined as practices through which magazines pragmatically make and 'remake' their position. They are 'stepping stones' in the construction of broader public narratives, which as such remain open to

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<sup>16</sup> The next chapters (particularly Chapter 5) will return to RAI and its role in shaping the politics of the popular music press.



further qualification and redefinition. A focus on position-takings, then, made it possible to integrate the concerns of the SVE programme with boundary-work and justifications within field theory (see Chapter 3). As complex institutional narratives, indeed, position-takings deal predominantly with the making of symbolic boundaries and justifications.<sup>17</sup> The sample employed for the analysis of position-takings includes 192 articles, which are distinct from music features.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4.3.3.3 Readers' letters and their mediation

The analysis of both readers' letters and their mediation required slightly different choices for the monthlies and *Ciao 2001*. The former used to devote between one and four pages to readers' letters in each issue, and as monthly publications they published fewer letters than *Ciao 2001*. In order to obtain a sample covering a sufficient variety of topics, I analysed the total amount of letters published between 1973 and 1977 (197), with the exclusion of letters focusing on technical issues (e.g. readers seeking advice about musical instruments or discographies). The sample, as a result, provides a comprehensive picture about the meanings that readers ascribed to the monthlies and about the ways in which they addressed the concerns of readers. By contrast, *Ciao 2001* devoted several thematised sections to readers' letters, thus it presented an amount of material that could not be addressed in its entirety (also considering that the magazine was a weekly publication). I decided to focus on the main section of letters (*Lettere al Direttore*): a four-five page section with a generalist focus that was managed by the magazine's editor-in-chief (Saverio

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<sup>17</sup> Unlike Boltanski and Thévenot (see Chapter 3), I define justifications in line with the approach outlined so far. In this respect, rather than drawing on 'orders of worths' encompassing different fields and social groups (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006), Italian music critics developed justifications shaped by their institutional orientation and national position.

<sup>18</sup> However, music features, as well as answers to the letters of readers, can present strong position-takings as well. I take these instances into account in my analysis.

Rotondi). This section was convenient because it covered different issues and was attributed to the magazine's founder and managing editor, who used this space to discuss and justify the politics of the magazine. These features made the section comparable to the ones implemented by *Muzak* and *Gong*. However, to reduce the material to a manageable sample, I applied a purposive sampling strategy. I sampled up to 5-7 letters across the four or five issues that the magazine used to publish each month. Further, while being inclusive with the variety of themes discussed by readers, I sampled exclusively letters that received an answer. In this way, I was able to obtain a large sample (290) based on several matters of discussion, and include some unexpected themes within the analysis. For example, the inclusion of soul and disco music in the coverage of *Ciao 2001* raised several complaints among readers who considered the genre 'too commercial'. The magazine, then, had to justify what some readers perceived as a strong institutional change (see Chapter 7). Moreover, a sample based on a variety of themes has enabled comparisons with the themes discussed in *Muzak* and *Gong*. In this respect, the findings show that the magazines framed similar issues in different ways, thus encouraging certain practices while stigmatising others. The purposive sampling, then, enabled an analysis of the magazines' mediation strategies vis-à-vis different topics of discussion.

In order to make the sampling of practices more effective, I defined more specific boundaries for the historical frame discussed above. I started sampling articles from October 1973 for *Ciao 2001* and *Muzak*, since this is when the latter was launched as a competitor of the former. For similar reasons, I started sampling *Gong* from its inception (October 1974). While *Muzak* was dismantled in June 1976, for *Ciao 2001* and *Gong* I sampled articles until August and October 1977, respectively. This

choice is largely due to the history of the two magazines. As already explained (see note 9), *Gong* changed both owners and editorial board after October 1977, becoming de facto a different magazine. In addition, since *Ciao 2001* was a weekly publication, I defined a temporal hiatus of one year – between August 1974 and July 1975 – to make the sample more manageable. In this way I produced an overall sample representing two distinct stages: October 1973-July 1974 and July 1975-August 1977. Since I found consistent strategies for the first stage, the hiatus was produced to make possible changes in the magazine's orientations more visible. This choice made changes in the strategy of music coverage (most notably the inclusion of new music genres like soul and disco) more evident, while other practices did not show significant changes.

#### **4.4 Methods: combining discourse and thematic analysis**

So far I have discussed several sampling choices informed by field theory and its conceptual baggage, as well as by reflexive engagement with music magazines and secondary sources. In this section, I discuss the choices of method and the ways in which they contribute to the overall methodological rationale.

##### *4.4.1 Discourse analysis*

Discourse analysis has been characteristically used to provide rich accounts of people's narratives and motivations (Bennett 2009), but also to analyse media texts and documents (Altheide 2000, Baumann and Johnston 2007). It is thus a suitable method to analyse the practices of music critics and to provide a 'thick description'<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Originally coined by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), the concept of thick description has been recently used in American cultural sociology to argue that meaning-making practices should be explored via hermeneutically rich methods (Alexander and Smith 2002). My use of discourse analysis is in line with this aim, albeit I situate the study of discourses, and meaning-making practices more

of their evaluative repertoire. However, it has been argued that discourse analysis raises some problems related to the definition of ‘discourse’ (Bhatia et al. 2008: 1-17; Matthews and Ross 2010: 390-393; Macgilchrist et al. 2011). In this respect, Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) sustain that scholars using discourse analysis tend to leave the definition of discourse either vague or implicit. As a result, ‘in many texts, there are no definitions or discussions of what discourse means. Authors treat the term as if the word has a clear, broadly agreed upon meaning [...] [but] this is simply not the case’ (*ibid.*, p. 315). Further, the notion of discourse may indicate very different epistemological stances. For example, the approach known as ‘critical discourse analysis’ takes discourses as indicators of deeper power relationships. It frames language as an ideologically charged medium supporting the interests of ‘dominant’ social groups (Bhatia et al. 2008: 11; Pennycook 1994: 121-124; Fairclough 1995). By contrast, scholars with a background in applied linguistics define discourse simply as a medium whose pragmatic function is analysed within specific interactions and situations. In this case, thus, language does not stand for deeper social or cultural structures (see Pennycook 1994: 115-121).

Although the concept of discourse may raise the aforementioned problems of definition and epistemological clarity, the framework outlined so far grounds discourse analysis into a broader methodological strategy, thus clarifying the potential ambiguity of the concept. More specifically, for Bourdieu, discourses are always produced by a position (i.e. an individual, group or organisation) endowed with distinctive historical and social properties (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 256-258). Further, discourses arise within specific fields, and as such depend on a field's system of relationships and space of possibles. Discursive practices, then, result from

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generally, within the Bourdieusian perspective discussed so far. In this respect, I combine ‘thick description’ with social history and a stronger attention to social and institutional differences.

actors struggling for recognition and to impose their own categories of perception (Bourdieu 1996: 195-198). As argued in the section on sampling, this perspective makes it possible to account for the extent to which critics' position within the music press and their position within the national space enabled the emergence of distinctive evaluations and justifications. Discourse analysis is thus a suitable method to enquire about how social actors reflect on their social and historical position, thus articulating public identities (Bottero 2010). It also makes it possible to identify the ways in which they define and evaluate different kinds of music; that is, how they *afford* music (DeNora 2000) from their specific institutional and social position. Finally, discourse analysis was appropriate to analyse the letters from readers and the ways in which they were mediated by critics. Nevertheless, while the method could address a variety of meaning-making practices, their differences required a further operationalisation at the level of coding and analytical strategy.

#### *4.4.2 Coding and analytical strategy*

In order to analyse the aforementioned practices (music coverage, position-takings and the mediation of readers' letters), I adopted an inductive approach to the development of codes. Following Lamont (1992), I used discourse analysis to inductively develop the criteria of evaluation mobilised by critics. This approach was appropriate to detect evaluative repertoires that could be specific to the Italian context and to some music genres rather than others.

As regards the analysis of **music coverage**, research on critics has frequently opted for a deductive definition of 'high-art' and 'popular' criteria. For example, van Venrooij and Schmutz (2010) have employed discursive criteria like 'originality', 'seriousness' and 'complexity' as indicators of critics' legitimising discourses, and

thus as indicators of the artistic consecration of popular music. As argued in Chapter 1, while this strategy has made it possible to identify (and measure) the importance of the highbrow discourse within the evaluations of critics, it has left unexplored the meanings that critics ascribe to specific music genres. By contrast, I adopted an open-ended approach to coding (Appelrouth 2011) in order to identify a broader range of evaluative criteria. Through this strategy I found that while the highbrow discourse was a key resource for Italian critics too, they ascribed distinctive social meanings to different music genres. Put otherwise, critics framed genres as embodying different properties, such as different histories, emotional qualities, places and people (see Chapter 7). In this respect, critics approached music genres as cultures in the anthropological sense of the word (Williams 1983: 87-93), and not simply as musical objects imbued with artistic value. Combining a more structured thematic analysis (see below) with thick description, Chapter 7 will explore these narratives and the meanings that different musics elicited from Italian critics.

For the analysis of **position-takings**, I similarly adopted an inductive approach, and focused on the ways in which magazines defined their positions *relationally*; that is, I looked at the institutions, organisations and groups that music critics called into question (polemically or otherwise) in order to build their institutional identity. Chapter 5 and 6 provide a detailed exploration of position-takings and the broader narratives they sustained.

Finally, to analyse **readers' letters**, I adopted a twofold strategy, as both letters and answers had to be taken into account. On the one hand, letters were assigned a descriptive code based on the issues – i.e. the main themes – risen by readers. On the other hand, the answers of critics were analysed to uncover their evaluative orientation towards these issues. I thus employed discourse analysis to analyse both

the discourses of readers and the ways magazines framed<sup>20</sup> them, and thematic analysis (see below) to cluster letters under common themes. As a result, Chapter 8 compares the ways in which different magazines evaluated a similar range of issues, and provides a detailed exploration of the meanings that readers ascribed to the magazines.

#### *4.4.3 Thematic analysis*

While discourse analysis was used to produce detailed accounts of critics' evaluative discourses, I also needed to map the recurrence of some themes across different articles. For this purpose I combined discourse analysis with thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method that qualitative researchers have employed to identify recurring themes within datasets (Boyatzis 1998), but also to provide thick descriptions of the ways in which themes are articulated by social actors across different instances (Braun and Clarke 2006). While this method, like content analysis (Hansen 1998), can produce countable codes, it can also be used to explore the richness of specific themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). Indeed, in contrast to content analysis, thematic analysis can place effective emphasis on the narrative context from which themes emerge. Although this may also be the purpose of qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2000, Hsieh and Shannon 2007), I drew on the framework of thematic analysis since it made easier to combine the analysis of discourses with the mapping of thematic trends.

From a theoretical standpoint, thematic analysis was employed to better identify the 'strategies' of magazines. As discussed in Chapter 3, Bourdieu describes strategies as relatively enduring practices, thus stressing their temporal dimension and historical

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<sup>20</sup> I use 'frame' as a synonym of evaluative strategy. In this respect, I did not employ frame analysis as a method, albeit the practices I dealt with may be considered as similar to those addressed by frame analysts (see Baumann 2007, Oliver and Johnston 2000, Merrill and Ferree 2000).

development. In this respect, I used thematic analysis to map both continuities and changes in the strategies of magazines. The method has been used mostly in relation to music coverage and readers' letters. For the former, it was used to track the evaluative criteria mobilised by critics across feature articles (see Chapter 7). I developed a semi-structured schedule with a list of evaluative criteria that had been developed inductively through discourse analysis, and which have then been mapped onto all the features analysed. Since the schedule included an open section devoted to discourse analysis and field notes, I could also analyse the narratives that critics developed in relation to different music genres. As regards readers' letters, thematic analysis has been used to cluster them under common categories. As already explained, letters were categorised on the basis of the issues raised by readers, so that I could compare the ways in which magazines evaluated a similar range of themes. Unlike music coverage and readers' letters, position-takings have not been addressed with thematic analysis. Indeed, position-takings led critics to develop distinctive arguments in each article. As a result, I used discourse analysis to reconstruct the overall narrative emerging from position-takings, paying attention to the making (and sometimes remaking) of their public identity. Overall, thematic analysis was employed only in relation to those practices for which I needed to track a higher number of categories (that is, evaluative criteria and issues raised by readers).<sup>21</sup>

#### **4.5 Handling and revising data: NVivo**

The data have been analysed during the archival research. At a later stage I used the software NVivo to both organise and revise the data. NVivo is data management software that allows for a number of practices, like electronic coding and the

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<sup>21</sup> A Codebook describing these categories is provided in Appendix B.



generation of frequencies about the collected data (e.g. number of articles about specific genres, number of articles written by given critics, and so on). While the software may be employed at different stages of the research process (Welsh 2002, Basit 2003), I used it only after having concluded the archival research. In this respect, I used NVivo to control the consistency of the sample; for example checking if a given critic or genre was underrepresented or otherwise. Moreover, in order to minimise ambiguities and mistakes, I used NVivo to revise the collected data and the attribution of codes. Although the software allows for further coding and exploration of datasets, I decided to use it only to revise the categories already established.

#### **4.6 Translation strategy**

As a proper research stage, translation has been problematised only recently in social research (Regmi et al. 2010), and researchers have employed very different procedures to deal with it. This diversity depends on the variety of issues that may arise during cross-cultural research. For example, researchers might struggle in dealing with participants speaking a different mother tongue; some languages might require transliteration other than translation; and more generally comparative research (i.e. research comparing two linguistically different groups or contexts) may pose further problems. My case differs in another respect, since my mother tongue is Italian – i.e. the language of primary sources and most of the secondary sources – while English is the dissemination language of the research and the language of the academic debates in which the research is situated. In this section, I discuss and clarify the role of translation in the research process. While a general discussion about the role of translation in cross-cultural research is beyond the scope of my thesis (see Temple and Young 2004, Jagosh 2009), an open discussion about the

choices taken during the research may clarify to the reader how the methodology outlined so far, as well as practical considerations, have informed the translation of data.

Translation occurred at a later stage of the research. While some chunks of data have been translated for conference presentations, most of the translation has occurred during the thesis writing up (October 2012 – September 2013). In this respect, during the collection and analysis of data I used Italian as my main language. This was the most congruent choice: my effort was to familiarise with the language of 1970s Italian critics, so that I could produce codes and interpretations grounded in the field's categories of perception and doxa (Bourdieu 1993). To introduce English at this stage, thus, would have been problematic and at odds with the logic of field theory. After the fieldwork, I had to translate mostly two kinds of content: the codes developed during data analysis, and the data excerpts discussed in the thesis' data chapters. As regards codes (e.g. critics' evaluative criteria and themes discussed by readers), they have not raised particular difficulties. They have semantic equivalents in English, and in some cases the strategies of evaluation of Italian critics match those of British and American critics. For example, both Italian and Anglo-American magazines used 'originality' as a category indicating that a certain piece of music or musicians was artistically valuable (Regev 1994). The question is slightly different for the translation of excerpts from the data. Here, while the semantic content does not present particular challenges, the syntax of Italian critics has peculiarities that at times makes translation more difficult. In this respect, many critics used to favour 'hypotaxis', that is, a rhetorical style based on long and complex sentence structures. Since an English translation reproducing these structures could compromise their meaning, I decided to reduce some sentences to simpler 'paratactic' constructions.

This choice would not be appropriate for a translation willing to preserve the literary qualities of cultural journalism. However, it is the most congruent choice for a sociological enquiry focusing on critics' evaluative practices. To be sure, the aesthetic and literary qualities of music criticism were explicitly identified by some critics as a value of popular music criticism. While these features are partly lost in my translations, I could still focus on the ways critics discussed and justified their linguistic choices, as they emerged as a stake of the field (see Chapter 8). As a result, this dimension of music criticism, while lost in the translation, is partly preserved through field theory's focus on the categories of social actors. Finally, whenever specific words or concepts need a broader contextualisation, I simply provide it with the discussion of data. In this respect, field theory is precisely about reconstructing the social and cultural context which 'charge' certain words and concepts with specific connotations.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the research's methodological rationale and the ways in which it has informed the fieldwork. More specifically, I have considered how field theory and Bourdieu's reflexive research practice have shaped my choices of sampling and method. I have also discussed how the engagement with data and familiarisation with critics' categories of perception have changed some preliminary choices and informed the operationalisation of concepts and methods. Finally, I have provided details about the ways in which data have been handled and translated from Italian to English. The next chapters will address more specifically the institutions, strategies and practices of Italian popular music critics and will contribute to enriching the debates discussed throughout the previous chapters.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Young, educated and cosmopolitan: the genesis and social construction of popular music criticism**

The chapter analyses the emergence of popular music criticism focusing on two entwined aspects of this process. First, it provides a historical narrative about the social trajectory of critics, as well as about the changing structure of the musical and cultural field during the post-war years. Second, it provides a thick description of the ways in which critics made sense of such space of possibles (Bourdieu 1996). The chapter will argue that Italian music critics had to face a partly different space of possibles than their American and British counterparts (Lindberg et al. 2005). This space was characterised by Italy's position as *importer* within an increasingly global recording industry (De Luigi 1982), and by the central role of the state (i.e. public radio and television) in the promotion of national popular music and culture. I will argue that it is in relation to these conditions that Italian critics defined the symbolic boundaries of popular music criticism. The chapter, in this respect, will provide a Bourdieusian analysis of the encounter between actors endowed with a distinctive cultural and symbolic capital, and the spaces of Italian musical and cultural production. While the next chapter will discuss the diversification and ‘politicisation’ of popular music criticism, here I focus on the way critics defined *shared stakes*<sup>1</sup> and the autonomy of the field vis-à-vis existing cultural institutions. I will also argue that economic capital, alongside symbolic and cultural capital, played a key role in the definition of the field's stakes, particularly for the magazine which, since the early

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<sup>1</sup> Recently, Savage and Silva (2013) have argued that field studies have focused mostly on competition and differences between cultural producers, thus underestimating the ‘intensities and shared passions’ (*ibid.*, p. 112) holding them together. The chapter addresses these issues focusing on the collective trajectory, shared dispositions and stakes of Italian critics.

1970s, gained the market leadership of popular music criticism (the weekly *Ciao 2001*).

From a methodological point of view, Chapters 5 and 6 deal mostly with position-takings (Bourdieu 1996) and the way critics made sense of the national-global space. Chapters 7 and 8 will focus on the way critics' position within the field informed their evaluation of music (Chapter 7) and interactions with readers (Chapter 8).

### **5.1 A new space of possibles: social and cultural changes in post-war Italy**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, since 1969 the popular music press went through a process of increasing specialisation and diversification. By and large, this situation was made possible by socio-cultural changes that date back to the early 1950s, and are related to the major transition of post-war Italy from a rural society with high rates of illiteracy, to an urban society reshaped by economic growth and patterns of social and geographical mobility (Ginsborg 1990, Lanaro 1992). In this respect, a key condition for the emergence of a 'specialised' popular music press (*stampa specializzata*) was a sufficiently autonomous and differentiated consumer society, which is what post-war Italy became since the years of its 'economic boom' (1958-1963). These changes strongly reshaped the national media system as well as music production and consumption. In this respect, the 1970s musical field showed marked differences vis-à-vis the ways in which popular music was produced, consumed and mediated in the previous two decades. Some of these changes took place also in other countries, albeit at different paces. It has been argued, indeed, that a stronger demand for education, the emergence of a distinctive youth identity and consumer culture, and the expansion of the recording industry are among the social transformations that enabled the emergence of rock criticism in US and UK.

(Lindberg et al. 2005, Regev 1994). However, the organisation of the media and cultural production in post-war Italy also featured important continuities with the institutional arrangements of the Fascist regime (1925-1945), such as a strong presence of the state in some sectors of cultural production (Colombo 1998). As I will argue, this arrangement – along with the idea of an ‘imperfect’ democracy (Chapter 6) – informed the cultural frame of reference that critics constructed in order to justify their practices. As a result, while British and American rock criticism were defined as a space of relative autonomy from the market, Italian music criticism was also defined as autonomous *from the state* and its cultural apparatus: that is, the light music (*musica leggera*) and mass culture (*cultura di massa*) promoted by Italian radio and television.

#### 5.1.1 Education and youth

A key transformation occurring during the post-war years was the growth in young people's access to secondary and higher education – a process that drastically changed the contours of Italian society and, more specifically, the conditions of youth from the late 1950s onwards. This process was fostered by a national law (1962) making education compulsory until the age of fourteen. The law had a significant impact on younger generations. In 1961-62 only 21.3 per cent of young people aged between 14-18 years attended secondary school (*scuola media superiore*). However, this figure steadily increased throughout the 1960s and 1970s, becoming 53 per cent in 1976-77. Overall, between 1951 and 1977, the number of young people attending secondary school increased from 416,348 to 2,197,750. This change increased the demand for higher education as well, with the number of people

attending university rising from 231,000 (1950-1951) to 936,000 (1975-1976).<sup>2</sup> As argued by Cavalli and Leccardi (1997: 717), it is through these processes that the condition of youth (*condizione giovanile*) started being associated with the 'student condition' (*condizione studentesca*). As I discuss further below, high educational attainments marked the experience of both critics and magazines' readers. On the one hand, the cultural capital acquired by critics through education became an important resource to define the symbolic boundaries of the new cultural field, as well as its distance from the social world of Italian light music. On the other hand, the growth of mass education provided the popular music press with an audience of young consumers capable of making (and appreciating) finer cultural distinctions within the realm of popular music.

#### *5.1.2 Cultural consumption and social distinction*

The years of the economic boom also led to a general increase in cultural expenditure (Forgacs 1990: 132). In this respect, the 1960s saw a significant expansion in the consumption of tabloids (Sorcinelli 2005: 9-24), television (Monteleone 2003) and popular music (see below). Furthermore, cultural consumption underwent through a process of diversification taking place mostly along generational lines. Early in the 1950s, adults and young people used to prefer the same kinds of music, tabloids and books (Cavalli and Leccardi 1997: 726-728). However, consumption practices started changing as soon as the second half of the 1950s, particularly in relation to music and fashion. Rock 'n' roll became one of the first visible signs of a youth identity which was still tentatively articulated, rather than self-consciously defined in opposition to a parental culture (Piccone Stella 1993). More generally, it was

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<sup>2</sup> The data are taken from Cavalli and Leccardi (1997), who draw on figures provided by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) as well as other sources.

throughout the 1960s that youth culture was defined as autonomous from both the culture of older generations and young people's socio-economic backgrounds; albeit I will argue that differences in class, gender and geographical location significantly marked the genesis of popular music criticism and, as I show in Chapter 8, the experience of its readers. A growing consumer culture aimed at teenagers also provided the ground for the emergence of the first 'teen' magazines entirely devoted to the social experience of young people (Grispigni 1998). The first Italian teen magazine (*Ciao Amici*) was indeed launched in 1963, and was soon followed by similar initiatives such as *Big* (1965) and *Ragazza Pop* (1966), the latter explicitly targeting girls. As I demonstrate later in the chapter, these social changes made the 'youth culture' a strong symbolic weapon for popular music critics working in the 1970s. Indeed, they defined the boundaries of popular music criticism not only along aesthetic lines, but mobilising a symbolic capital grounded in their shared generational trajectory and 'cosmopolitan' (i.e. mostly Anglo-American) musical education, thus constructing the field as a generational space. At a later stage, this shared generational identity became the ground for a symbolic struggle between different magazines, as they could claim to be the 'truer' representative of youth culture (see Chapter 6).

It is important to stress that these processes of diversification went hand-in-hand with the commercial growth of Italian popular culture at large. Indeed, while young people were turning to distinct (and distinctive) cultural choices, tabloid magazines and television were the media chosen by a broader and undifferentiated audience. The position of radio and television within such landscape was rather peculiar. The state-controlled company RAI held the monopoly of broadcasting frequencies both for radio (since 1944) and for television (since its introduction in 1954).



Subscriptions to RAI were compulsory by law for any family owning either radio or television equipment; an arrangement that did not change despite the fact that RAI lost the monopoly of frequencies in 1976. As a result, during the post-war years television became the major form of popular entertainment in Italy, with the growth of subscriptions raising hand-in-hand with the ownership of television equipments among Italian families.<sup>3</sup> This situation made RAI a key promotional vehicle for the Italian recording industry, with both radio and television being pivotal for the development of a musical star-system based on singers whose image was constructed through such media (De Luigi 1982: 17-22). As I discuss below, the prominent role of RAI within the musical field was both recognised and challenged by music critics, who aimed to promote both a different kind of popular music and a different kind of Italian culture.

### *5.1.3 Music production and consumption*

Both the production and consumption of music underwent significant changes during these years, which are partly related to the urbanisation of Italy described so far. As reported by De Luigi (1982: 5-6), between the late 1940s and early 1980s the selling figures of the recording industry grew from 1 million (1948) to 60 million (1980).<sup>4</sup> The post-war years, in this respect, witnessed the transition from a publishing-based model of music business to a model based on recordings, with 45 single records – and later 33 long playings – becoming the standard for the commercial circulation of music, and with popular music (usually referred to as *musica leggera*; light music) gaining the lion's share of the industry's revenues as soon as 1958 (*ibid.*, pp. 17-22).

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<sup>3</sup> Subscriptions to RAI rose throughout the post-war years, with the company reaching 92% of Italian families by 1975 (Monteleone 2003: 372).

<sup>4</sup> The figure includes 78, 45 and 33 inch records.

The recording industry also contributed to the spread of music styles different from the ones which were favoured in the early 1950s (i.e. national light songs, Opera songs, and early imitations of American jazz; *ibid.*, p. 11). In this respect, a more competitive music business with increasingly more record companies fostered the acquisition of 'foreign' catalogues, leading to the introduction of styles like rock 'n' roll and – throughout the 1960s – beat, folk-rock, rhythm 'n' blues and British progressive rock (the latter from the late 1960s onwards). During the same years, multinational record companies – starting with RCA in 1949 – opened their subdivisions in Italy; a process which reached a peak in 1972 with the opening of the Italian divisions of WEA and CBS (*ibid.*, pp. 30-36).<sup>5</sup> Overall, the Italian recording industry went through a process of increasing globalisation. While Italy occupied what can be considered a 'subordinate' position within a global recording industry centred around American and British exports, non-national musical styles became a key cultural resource for the development of popular music criticism. Indeed, it was through the relationship with such music styles that critics developed a shared habitus (Bourdieu 1996) and *cosmopolitan disposition* toward Italian cultural trends. Further transformations did inform the space of possibles faced by popular music critics. In this respect, during the late 1960s the consumption and production of 33 long-playings were acquiring a different meaning than 45 singles. On the one hand, their selling figures grew throughout the 1970s, which fostered the creation of an album chart as soon as 1971 (Salvatori 1982).<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, American and British rock artists were contributing to a key cultural transformation, namely the invention of the 'album' conceived as the coherent and original creation of an 'artist'

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<sup>5</sup> By this time, other 'majors' such as Decca, EMI, Phonogram and RCA had already opened subdivisions in Italy.

<sup>6</sup> Between 1969 and 1979 the selling figures of albums rose from 4 to 20 million of copies (De Luigi 1982: 53).

or group of musicians. New forms of Italian popular music contributed to this process as well, namely the singer-songwriter song (Santoro 2010b) and Italian rock bands formed from the late 1960s onward (Facchinotti 2001). These younger cultural producers, who were informed by a range of American, British and French influences, explicitly defined their music as an original artistic creation. It is in relation to this redefined musical field that new, emerging music magazines started working as competing *agents of legitimation* for both new forms of Italian popular music and for the international music trends introduced in Italy during the years under study.

So far I have described the major social and cultural changes which made possible the emergence of popular music criticism in Italy. More specifically, I have focused on the social changes that affected the youngest generations born after Second World War (the ones to which both critics and readers belonged), and on changes taking place within the musical and cultural sectors. The next section focuses more specifically on the popular music press and its actors, and shows the extent to which their trajectories had been shaped by the broader social changes described above. I will argue that while a relatively young age and high educational attainment were key features of the social profile of both critics and readers, the field was also marked by the social inequalities that had affected Italian economic and social development during the post-war years (Ginsborg 1990, Lanaro 1992). These inequalities concern mostly the differences between the more urbanised, literate, and richer regions of the North-Centre in contrast to Southern regions, whose development in the sectors of education, cultural production and consumption had remained modest (Forgacs 1996). In this respect, the next section shows that cultural

and generational distinctions drawn by critics to define the field – which I explore in Section 3 – were sustained by people coming from the urban North-Centre, living in Italian cultural and economic centres (Rome and Milan), and with at least a middle-class background. Gender inequalities also shaped the field in this respect, making the popular music press a predominantly male profession and music magazines a media read by a majority of male readers.

## **5.2 Introducing the field: the trajectories of critics and their audience**

While teen magazines had been created during the 1960s, new magazines focusing on the critical evaluation of popular music can be considered a 1970s invention. To be sure, some publications aimed at popular music's amateurs already existed in Italy. For example, a magazine specialising in jazz music (*Musica Jazz*) had existed from 1945 onwards. However, jazz used to represent a small niche of music listeners in Italy (RAI 1969: 104-116). Similarly, some publications devoted to classical music and jazz, and occasionally to singer-songwriters, did not have a national circulation and were read by a small audience of amateurs (Tomatis 2005/2006: 12-14). On the contrary, during the 1970s popular music criticism grew into a proper field; a development made possible by the existence of a broader audience of young music listeners. In this respect, a high number of publications was launched throughout the 1970s (**table 5.1**). While some of them still followed the format of the teen magazine (*Qui Giovani*), others specialised in the coverage of Anglo-American and Italian pop-rock acts (*Super Sound*, *Nuovo Sound*).<sup>7</sup> In this context, *Ciao 2001* became the most successful and long-lasting magazine with selling figures ranging between 60,000 and 80,000 copies per week (Rusconi 1976) – a position of

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<sup>7</sup> For a general discussion of these magazines, which my research does not analyse, see Casiraghi (2005).

leadership that it was able to maintain until the early 1980s (Gaspari 1980: 88-89).

**Table 5.1, Popular music magazines launched during the 1970s**

1960s	1970s
<i>Teen magazines</i>	<i>New popular music magazines</i>
<i>Ciao Amici</i> (1963-1967, Milan) <i>Big</i> (1965-1967, Rome) <i>Ciao Big</i> (1967-1969, Rome) <i>Ragazza Pop</i> (1966-?, Rome)	<i>Ciao 2001</i> (1969-1998, Rome) <i>Muzak</i> (1973-1976, Rome) <i>Gong</i> (1974-1978, Milan) <i>Super Sound</i> (1972-1974, Rome) <i>Nuovo Sound</i> (1975-1981, Rome) <i>Qui Giovani</i> (1970-1974, Milan) <i>Sound Flash</i> (1972-1973, Rome) <i>Popster</i> (1978-1980, Rome) <i>Mucchio Selvaggio</i> (1977 onwards, Rome) <i>Rockerilla</i> (1978 onwards, Savona)

On the contrary, *Muzak* and *Gong* came to represent smaller niches of readers, selling up to 35,000 (*Muzak*) and between 20,000-15,000 (*Gong*) copies per month, respectively (Rusconi 1976, Bolelli 1979).

These new music magazines explicitly situated themselves within the youth culture. As shown by data collected by *Ciao 2001*, *Gong* and *Muzak* between 1974 and 1976 (**table 5.2**),<sup>8</sup> young people were indeed their main audience. According to these data, the audience was young, relatively educated and mostly male. Readers were aged between 13 and 25 years, with the majority of them being in their late teens or early twenties.<sup>9</sup> About 70 per cent defined themselves as ‘students’ (i.e. secondary school

<sup>8</sup> Table 5.2 summarises data which have been published by *Ciao 2001* (n. 22, 6 June 1976), *Muzak* (n. 12, October 1974; n. 12, April 1976), *Gong* (n. 6, June 1975; booklet enclosed with the issue). The magazines collected these data through mail questionnaires. Since they were collected at different times and with different methodologies, the data must be taken with some caution. They should be considered as different ‘snapshots’ of the audience, which, as such, show some major common trends. The data reported by *Ciao 2001* and *Gong* are based on random samples of 1000 and 586 questionnaires respectively, while *Muzak*’s data are based on the total number of questionnaires which the magazine received (13,678). The magazine collected new data around 1976, and published findings very similar to those published earlier. However, the new findings were published without the methodology.

<sup>9</sup> The magazines grouped their data according to different age categories, which are reproduced in

or university students) or ‘working students’ (*studenti lavoratori*), whereas ‘workers’ represented a smaller group of readers.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 5.2, Magazines' readership**

	<b>Ciao 2001</b>	<b>Muzak</b>	<b>Gong</b>
<b>Age</b>	Younger than 17 (33,8%) 17-20 (48,9%) 21-25 (14,4%) Older than 25 (1,9%) Unanswered (1,0%)	Younger than 17 (18,6%) 17-20 (48,3%) 21-25 (26%) Older than 25 (7%)	Younger than 15 (6,5%) 16-18 (33,4%) 19-21 (35,2%) 22-24 (14,1%) Older than 24 (10,8%)
<b>Education</b>	Students (68,6%) Workers (25,6%) Unemployed (2,1%) Unanswered (3,7%)	Students (62,7%) Working students (13,2%) Workers (20,3%) Military service (4,8%)	Students (57,1%) Working students (14,2%) Workers (24,9%) Unanswered (3,8%)
<b>Sex</b>	– –	Men (73,2%) Women (26,8%)	Men (73,4%) Women (26,6%)
<b>Socio-economic background</b>	–	Readers framed as coming from middle class ( <i>piccola borghesia</i> ) and working class ( <i>proletariato</i> ) in equal measure.	Readers classified as ‘middle-class’ (60,4%), ‘upper and upper-middle’ (18,7%), ‘lower-middle’ (18,8%) and ‘lower’ (2,1%).

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Table 2.1. The only exception is *Ciao 2001*, as it reported the proportion of readers for each single year (from 13 to 32 years old). To increase comparability, I recoded the data of *Ciao 2001* according to the age categories defined by *Muzak*. This makes the data easier to display and to compare across magazines. Recoding the data of *Ciao 2001* according to the categories of *Gong* would not have changed the substance of my claim (that is, the majority of magazines’ readers were likely to be in their late teens or early twenties).

<sup>10</sup> Given the age of readers (between 13-25), it is very likely that the majority of workers had at least a secondary school diploma – a title which was already high in comparison with the average educational level of former generations (Cavalli and Leccardi 1997).

**Table 5.2, Magazines' readership (cont'd)**

	<b>Ciao 2001</b>	<b>Muzak</b>	<b>Gong</b>
<b>Geographical distribution</b>	—	Readers framed as coming mostly from the North-Centre ( <i>setteentrionali</i> ).	North-West (33,3%) North-East (24,6%) Centre (20,3%) South and isles (21,8%)

The relative presence of working students and workers among readers suggest some variety in their socio-economic background; as confirmed also by the data of *Gong* and *Muzak* about class (see below). The youngest magazine readers – who were attending secondary school – were also likely to make the readership socially diverse.

The trajectory of music critics was similarly marked by the expansion of secondary and university education, albeit they were slightly older than their readers. Moreover, as their readers critics were mostly male. This is what emerges from an analysis of their biographies (**table 5.3**), which I made using the biographical profiles of 34 critics working for *Ciao 2001*, *Muzak* and *Gong*.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 5.3, Music journalists writing on *Ciao 2001*, *Muzak* and *Gong* (1973-1977)**

<b>Date of Birth</b>	Born between 1950-1957 (16), 1945-1949 (6), 1942-1944 (3), 1938 (1), 1933 (1); no mention to date of birth (7)
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<sup>11</sup> This is a convenience sample, as it represents all the critics on which I was able to find biographical information. Biographical profiles range from very detailed accounts to basic information about place/date of birth, education and professional trajectory. For a list of names and sources see Appendix A. The sample represents the founders and main writers of the three magazines for the years under study; it lacks information about occasional collaborators.

**Table 5.3, Music journalists writing on *Ciao 2001*, *Muzak* and *Gong* (cont'd)**

<b>Education</b>	<u>Diploma (secondary school):</u> 16* - <i>liceo</i> : 14 - non-specified or other: 2  <u>Laurea (degree):</u> 12 - (7 mention <i>liceo</i> as secondary school)  No mention to education: 6
<b>Place of Birth</b>	<u>North Italy:</u> Milan (3), La Spezia (2), Turin (1), Novara (1), Parma (1), Ravenna (1)  <u>Centre:</u> Rome (13), Pescara (1)  <u>South and isles:</u> Naples (3), Benevento (1), Sassari (1)  <u>Other:</u> Lubecca – Germany (1)  No mention to place of birth (5)
<b>Gender</b>	Men: 26; Women: 8**

These music critics were in their twenties during 1973-1977, most of them born between 1949 and 1957.<sup>12</sup> They also had significantly high educational attainments. In this respect, those mentioning their education were graduates, university students, or had at least a secondary school *diploma*. It is worth considering, then, that those mentioning secondary education went through either classic or scientific *liceo*. This was (and still is) the most prestigious form of secondary education in Italy, and its *diploma* was the only title granting access to university courses until the 1969.<sup>13</sup> The

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\* This number includes university drop-outs (1) and people who do not specify if attendance led to a degree (3).

\*\* This sample includes only 3 women who regularly wrote about music (Maria Laura Giulietti, *Ciao 2001*; Fiorella Gentile, *Ciao 2001*; Gloria Mattioni, *Gong*). The rest of the sample includes women who wrote about social and political issues (Francesca Grazzini, *Gong*; Emina C. Vukovic, *Gong*; Lidia Ravera, *Muzak*; Mariù Safier, *Ciao 2001*), and a photographer (Silvia Lelli Masotti, *Gong*). This sexual division of labour will be discussed further in Chapter 7.

<sup>12</sup> The strongest exception to this collective trajectory was the editor in chief and co-owner of *Ciao 2001* (Saverio Rotondi), who was born in 1933. Arguably, this explains why Rotondi used to assume the position of an ‘older brother’ when answering the letters of readers (see Chapter 6).

<sup>13</sup> Albeit a partial ‘liberalisation’ of university access had already started in 1961 (Barbagli 1974: 386).



*liceo* was the educational path usually taken by the upper and middle classes, and despite a broadened demand for education, it remained a school devoted to this task (Barbagli 1974),<sup>14</sup> which indirectly penalised people from poorer backgrounds (Cavalli and Leccardi: 717-718). While many critics mention *liceo* as educational attainment, those who graduated were likely to have gone through such a path in order to access higher education. This suggests, at the very least, that Italian music critics usually came from a middle or upper-middle class background – a profile which is confirmed by the more detailed biographies of some founders and directors of the magazines.<sup>15</sup> This generalisation is also supported by data regarding geographical location. In this respect, the majority of critics came from North-Centre urban centres, with 13 people out of 34 being born in Rome, Italy's capital and most populated city. While others were originally from Northern cities (e.g. Milan, Turin, Parma), only 4 people came from the South, with 3 out of 4 being born in Naples; Italy's third biggest city and the closest to Rome among Italy's urban centres.<sup>16</sup> By and large, these data show that it was very unlikely for people from Southern regions (e.g. Sicily, Puglia, Basilicata and Calabria), and without a sufficient amount of economic and cultural capital, to become involved with the popular music press as critics during these years. Moreover, the production of music magazines was strongly centralised in Rome and Milan. These were the cities where both 1960s and 1970s magazines were produced (see **table 5.1**), and where their editorial boards were

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<sup>14</sup> Barbagli (1974: 373-381) shows that during the 1950s and 60s the social composition of *liceali* (students graduating from *licei*) remained stable: graduates with a working class background were 7.57% in 1952-53. They were still only 11.03% in 1969-70.

<sup>15</sup> While there are some important differences among individual trajectories, an upper or middle-class background is what emerges from the biographies of Giaime Pintor (director of *Muzak*) Saverio Rotondi (director and co-owner of *Ciao 2001*), Marco Fumagalli (a founder of *Gong*), Marco Lombardo Radice (*Muzak*), Lidia Ravera (co-director of *Muzak*), Luigi Manconi (*Muzak*).

<sup>16</sup> Only one critic (Luigi Manconi, *Muzak*) was born in Sardinia (Sassari), but he moved to Milan to pursue a degree in political sciences. Similarly, the Southern-born Saverio Rotondi (Benevento) moved to Rome to attend university.

based. It was here that the larger apparatus sustaining the circulation of magazines was situated, that is, the company distributing the magazines nationally (*Parrini and Co.*) and the companies providing advertising.<sup>17</sup> The offices of record companies were also concentrated in Rome and Milan (De Luigi 1982, Gaspari 1980), thus making these two cities pivotal for the emergence of the field.

The popular music press, in essence, was marked by the broader spacial inequalities which had impacted on other sectors of cultural production (Forgacs 1990), and more generally on Italy's economic miracle (Lanaro 1992, Ginsborg 1990). However, critics defined the field mostly through the making of aesthetic and generational distinctions. It is important to keep in mind, therefore, that the social construction of popular music criticism, while emphasising a shared (and potentially inclusive) generational identity, was shaped by a subset of urban, educated and middle-class young people.<sup>18</sup> The next section explores the ways in which they mobilised their cultural and symbolic capital in order to construct popular music criticism as a field devoted to a different kind of popular music and, more generally, to a different kind of Italian culture. In this respect, it looks at the ways critics addressed the Italian musical and cultural field of the 1970s in order to define new practices and identities.

### **5.3 The social construction of popular music criticism**

#### *5.3.1 A different kind of national culture: breaking with 'light' music*

While magazines developed different strategies and positions throughout the years 1973-1977, the field of popular music criticism was primarily defined as something other than the world of Italian light music. The so-called *musica leggera* is a style

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<sup>17</sup> These data have been collected from the editorial pages of magazines.

<sup>18</sup> As I discuss in Chapter 8, readers frequently addressed (and criticised) critics' privileges.

whose contours had been shaped since the early 1950s by the *Sanremo Festival* – a musical competition that became one of the most popular media events as soon as it started being broadcast on national television in 1955.<sup>19</sup> In terms of musical style, the so-called ‘Sanremo song’ has been described as based on ‘the vocal, melodic and orchestral mechanisms of the *bel canto* tradition, with traces of various local urban traditions’. The lyrics, then, used to be ‘openly moralising and rich in rhetoric’, while addressing ‘the traditional values of country, church and family’ (Agostini 2007: 390). However, popular music critics did not simply reject a musical style, but the whole social and professional world associated with it, which included *Sanremo* and other musical shows broadcast by RAI. *Ciao 2001* was the first magazine to take position against these institutions and against Italian singers and performers deemed part of their world. In 1973 the tenets of this critique were already well-defined, as shown by a feature about the 9th *Mostra della musica leggera* (festival of light music) published in October. The *mostra* was an annual event which, from 1969, awarded a prize to the Italian song (i.e. 45 single) most sold during former year. As with *Sanremo*, it was broadcast on national television. *Ciao 2001* framed the 1973 edition as emblematic of a musical, generational and national culture that critics rejected primarily on the basis of its low aesthetic qualities. It is on such basis that the following example, which evaluates the performance of the festival's international guest (Diana Ross), draws symbolic boundaries between Italian and American light music:

The presence of Diana Ross allows for some comparisons between American light

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<sup>19</sup> As a TV show *Sanremo* used to have an audience between 18 and 25 million viewers during the 1970s, and was frequently one of the most popular ten shows annually broadcast by RAI (Sfardini 2001). However, the songs launched by the festival were not necessarily successful once released as singles (Facchinotti 2001: 43-45).

music and ours. There is no need to say that these two worlds are the antithesis of each other. [...] The [Italian] music was cheesy [*stucchevole*] and loud. On the contrary, a minimal rhythmic session (piano, guitar and drums) provided a smooth background for Diana Ross's limpid notes. The violins that had accompanied Gigliola Cinquetti's *Il tango delle capinere* had finally stopped! She even offered an unrequested encore with *La spagnola*; it entranced the wrinklies who had sacrificed their pensions to attend the show.<sup>20</sup>

Here, the performance of Diana Ross becomes a resource to depict both different aesthetic systems and social worlds. On the one hand, Italian light music – represented by the popular singer Gigliola Cinquetti – is framed as cheesy and loud in contrast to the elegance of Ross's music. On the other hand, Cinquetti also represents an audience of elders, who are harshly parodied as willing to invest their pensions in order to attend the show. As in other articles, the boundaries between Italian and Anglo-American popular music are defined along both aesthetic and generational lines. Moreover, this difference is reinforced through the framing of foreign pop music as the product of a more meritocratic professional world, and belonging to the present rather than the past.

She [Diana Ross] represents a different world, where you have to sweat, study for years and go through tough experiences before becoming a big [star]. These comments are not the result of xenophilia, which would be a form of provincialism. They are due to a simple fact: there is a gulf, which perhaps will never be shortened, between our singers and foreign ones (American, English, French). Everything [in Italy] is like it was ten or twenty years ago, and if we can still save face is thanks to some singer-

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<sup>20</sup> Romolo Belardi, 'Venezia: dal colera alla spagnola', *Ciao 2001*, n. 40 (7 October 1973), p. 26-27.

songwriters and pop bands.<sup>21</sup>

The Italian singer-songwriters and pop bands mentioned by the article, in line with their American and European counterparts, represent the object of what can be defined as a *cosmopolitan disposition* toward popular music and culture; one openly promoted by *Ciao 2001* and the monthlies as well. This disposition praises a *different* Italian culture, namely Italian pop-rock bands, singer-songwriters, but also musicians working at the crossroad between jazz, avant-garde and rock. Critics conceived of this kind of music as an avant-garde in relation to which they could construct a whole narrative about the history of Italian popular music. This narrative could mobilise the concept of light music in a relatively flexible way. In this respect, *musica leggera* could include Italian performers from the late 1950s, who had been associated with rock'n'roll (like Adriano Celentano and Mina), as well as singers-songwriters who were considered too 'commercial' in relation to more innovative authors. It is in this light that the following article defines the distinction between Italian avant-garde pop-rock and the older tendencies of Italian popular music, while commenting on the interest of British magazines like Melody Maker and NME for Italian popular music:

The renewed interest [for Italian musicians] among the English audience comes at the best of times. However, we hoped for a different orientation; that is, Premiata Forneria Marconi, Banco del Mutuo Soccorso, Orme, Osanna or Alan Sorrenti. In other words, *our avant-garde artists*. [...] One wonders if people like Celentano and Battisti could really make way for our avant-garde bands, or if they will compromise a long-awaited exportation! In sum, this is probably a positive trend [...] It is important to start talking

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<sup>21</sup> Romolo Belardi, *ibid.*

about Italy in any way [...]. It will become easier to introduce new bands thereafter.<sup>22</sup>

[my emphasis]

The bands mentioned by the critic belong to the milieu of Italian ‘progressive rock’. In contrast to this avant-garde, a popular performer who used to be associated with 1950s rock ‘n’ roll (Celentano) and one of the most popular singer-songwriters of the 1970s (Battisti) could be associated with another – and implicitly older – Italy. More generally, the music magazines set up in the early 1970s frequently expressed cultural closeness to the avant-gardes of Italian popular music. The newly launched *Muzak* and *Gong*, in this respect, also devoted several articles to Italian rock bands.<sup>23</sup> On the contrary, musicians considered representatives of light music did not receive any coverage in these magazines throughout the years 1973 to 1977, albeit the last example shows that the boundaries of light music were themselves subject to debate and review.<sup>24</sup>

The appreciation of music critics for Italian pop-rock acts shows that they were participating to what Regev (2007a, 2007b) calls ‘aesthetic cosmopolitanism’.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Enzo Caffarelli, ‘Avanguardia e mercato. Chi preferiscono gli inglesi?’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 10 (10 March 1974), p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> *Muzak* published feature articles about *Banco del Mutuo Soccorso*, *PFM*, *Osanna*, *Alan Sorrenti* (n. 1, October 1973), *Uno* (n. 5, March 1974), and *Area* (n. 8, June 1974) among others. Similarly, *Gong* published articles about *Volo* (n. 1, October 1974), *Sensations' Fix* (n. 3, December 1974), *Area* (n. 1, January 1974) and *Aktuala* (n. 2, February 1974).

<sup>24</sup> This is why *Muzak* and *Gong* focused on a more restricted ‘canon’ of Italian avant-garde artists later on. They justified a more selective approach to Italian rock and jazz in the following articles: Gino Castaldo, ‘Il complesso del disco’, *Muzak*, n. 12 (new series), April 1976, pp. 15-16; Peppo Delconte, ‘Mitologia del cantautore: la balena e i falsi profeti’, *Gong*, n. 12, December 1976, pp. 48-51.

<sup>25</sup> See Chapter 2 for a broader discussion of Regev's framework vis-à-vis other studies about the global circulation of popular music. Regev's work is part of a broader sociological debate about ‘ordinary’ forms of cosmopolitanism (Lamont and Aksartova 2002, Beck and Sznaider 2006). This debate has focused on people's everyday encounters with foreign cultures, which are made possible by transnational flows of people, resources and media (Appadurai 1990). Focusing on the empirical study of people's ideas about other cultures and societies, research on ordinary cosmopolitanism has rejected the normative stance of *philosophical* cosmopolitanism, which articulates a more ideal and abstract understanding of post-national citizenship and trans-national relationships (Inglis and Robertson 2011). A full discussion of both philosophical and ordinary cosmopolitanism is beyond the scope of

According to Regev, aesthetic cosmopolitanism is a cultural disposition that has emerged in other countries similarly affected by the introduction of Anglo-American pop-rock. This disposition is articulated by new cultural producers (e.g. musicians) who have been exposed to this kind of music. However, it does not imply a simple celebration of ‘foreign’ pop-rock, but the development of new notions of ‘national uniqueness’. More specifically, local cultural producers employ British and American idioms in order to produce new forms of national popular music – a process fostering a symbolic struggle between the newer (and younger) cultural producers and the field of national culture. While Italian music critics were participating in a similar struggle, I show below that they had to define their cultural uniqueness by addressing a complex web of institutions, practices and technologies, as well as defining the autonomy of their choices from those of Italian rock musicians. In this respect, the break with light music also implied a break with certain production and consumption practices, as well as with other media (see Section 3). As regards production practices, music critics supported musicians who were ‘authors’ rather than just singers or performers, hence rejecting the division of labour between songwriters and singers (an arrangement associated with the world of light music). Moreover, these artists used to publish albums rather than singles, with the former being conceived as the vehicle of an original artistic discourse from the late 1960s onwards (Facchinetti 2001). The article below, published by *Ciao 2001* as an overview of the music-related events of 1976, remarks that this symbolic boundary between a world of singers and songs and – implicitly – a world of authors and albums deserves critical attention.

The soap-song [*canzone-saponetta*] still dominates the chart of 45s, with an endless

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this thesis, which focuses on the more specific case outlined by Regev.

list of vocal bands [*complessini*] with the same names. Drawing on the fad of disco music, these songs are replacing those of Sanremo and Saint Vincent. Singer-songwriters, then, are entering a fading stage, that is, there has been some inflation [of releases]. Anyway, the audience will not be bluffed by improvised poets and greedy industry executives [*discografici*] lacking any critical capacity.<sup>26</sup>

The excerpt remarks on the distinction between two different ways of producing (and implicitly consuming) popular music, casting a negative light on the realm of sameness and lack of originality demonstrated by singers (‘vocal bands’) and 45 singles. Within this realm, disco music<sup>27</sup> occupies the same ‘low’ position of the songs promoted by *Sanremo* and other events broadcast by RAI (like the Saint Vincent's festival *Un Disco per l'Estate*). However, the article also highlights the question of the *relative autonomy* between the popular music press and the cultural producers it supported. In this respect, critics' relationship with both Italian and foreign pop-rock was not unconditionally supportive, and the discourse about these trends was framed as an open and ongoing question. These musical worlds could be depicted as better realities in contrast to Italian light music, but what critics asked of musicians was the need to find their own personality and artistic voice. This is why the success of singer-songwriters is framed as problematic in the former example, namely because it could compromise the artistic integrity of authors, leading to a scenario in which the recording industry exploits the genre producing ‘improvised poets’ rather than *true* artists. The primacy given to artistic quality shows that critics' cosmopolitan disposition was sustained by their cultural capital, that is, their familiarity with highbrow categories (see also Chapter 7). It was on the basis of such

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<sup>26</sup> Enzo Caffarelli, ‘1976’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 3, 23 January 1977, pp. 31-36.

<sup>27</sup> See Chapter 7 for a broader discussion of the way music magazines covered disco music.



highbrow qualities that music, regardless of its nationality, was evaluated. And it was critics' cultural capital that made it possible to define popular music criticism as a space that was relatively autonomous from musical production. The question emerges also in the following article assessing the 'state of the art' of Italian pop-rock music.

Our pop music has only five or six names which could compete with the hundreds of good groups coming from abroad. Perhaps they are simply better supported, more personal and [musically] more prepared [...]. It is true what we have been saying for a year or so: things are changing, but this does not mean that [Italian pop musicians] must stop working [on their music] or start congratulating themselves. Quite the reverse: they should be more and more committed [to their music]. [...] A truly honest artist should always work towards improvement of himself and his work. Only in this way will his work reach the highest qualitative levels.<sup>28</sup>

As in other position-takings on Italian music, what emerges is a relative homology<sup>29</sup> (Bourdieu 1984) between popular music criticism and the milieu of Italian pop-rock music. Critics and musicians occupied a similar position within the musical field, since they both supported a different kind of national popular music, different production and consumption practices, and the autonomy of music from the mechanisms of the recording industry. Moreover, musicians and critics were likely to share a similar social and generational trajectory. Indeed, the social profile of singer-songwriters (Santoro 2010b: 57-58) was very close to the one of music critics as it emerges from Section 2. Nevertheless, while participating in the definition of a more

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<sup>28</sup> Fiorella Gentile, 'Incontro con i cantautori: "...e voi che ne pensate"?' , *Ciao 2001*, n. 46 (18 November 1973), pp. 45-46.

<sup>29</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion of homology vis-à-vis Bourdieu's conceptual tool-kit.

cosmopolitan Italian music culture, critics were willing to define a space of ‘critical’ autonomy from the practices of musicians – a space which implied ongoing evaluation and the possibility of reshaping genre-narratives (see Chapter 7).

In order to understand the aesthetic cosmopolitanism of popular music critics, one has to also consider the shared *generational habitus*<sup>30</sup> of the people who created the field. This habitus emerges especially when critics put forward biographical narratives that emphasise a shared musical ‘education’ based on American and British popular music. These narratives usually speak for a generational ‘we’, as it emerges in the following article about the situation of pop-rock in Italy.

I remember when several years ago it was considered outrageous to go out with short skirts and long hair [...] I also remember thousands of discussions about the emergence of a new music [...] they were pronounced with some doubts. Was it culture or otherwise? If [Eugenio] Montale's poems are culture and make us shiver, and if Cesare Pavese's images are striking for their beauty, then John Coltrane's saxophone and Bob Dylan's long spoken-songs deserve the same consideration. It does not matter if the former has gone and the latter is doing different things today. We should keep sustaining the cause. [...] For the future of music, today, we are considered also by England and America, and they should not see us as weak and vulnerable. [...] We have to convince record companies to invest on our most capable musicians – those who study eight hours a day and know what music really is. [They are] the youth who will create our musical culture.<sup>31</sup>

The narrative pairs the discovery of a new kind of music with participation in an emerging youth identity (the reference to long hair and short skirts). Moreover, the

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<sup>30</sup> The concept of habitus is discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>31</sup> Maria Laura Giulietti, ‘Allora, esiste la cultura rock?’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 45 (16 November 1975), p. 17.

value of popular musicians like Bob Dylan and John Coltrane is compared to two key figures of the Italian literary culture of the twentieth century (Eugenio Montale and Cesare Pavese) in order to assert that the former can be as valuable as the latter (that is, as high culture). Such historical narratives were also used by the monthlies to present themselves to their potential readership. In October 1973, the newly-launched *Muzak* proposed a similar generational narrative with an article called ‘self-portrait of the muzak generation’. The article, which was attributed to the whole editorial board, contextualises the magazine's focus on *muzak* (i.e. music without value)<sup>32</sup> through a narrative of ‘foreign’ musical education.

Three, four, five or perhaps ten years ago (who remembers Elvis?) anyone could find a momentary satisfaction in music. It could be marijuana, it could be another rum 'n' cola, it could be a partner to love [...] or the politics expressed by the simple, [Woody] Guthrie-like sound of Bob Dylan and the early Joan Baez. It could be Pink Floyd's rationality or the craziness of Zappa (always to be praised); or the sonic and vocal evolutions of the unforgettable Jimi [Hendrix]. It could be – why not? – The Beatles, even the disgustingly *muzak* of Michelle [Beatles' song], and the Rolling [Stones], a landmark for so many deaf and sad ears.<sup>33</sup>

In this example, Anglo-American popular music is still framed as part of a generational account of everyday life. More generally, the collective social trajectory evoked by such narratives constitutes one of the preconditions for the symbolic break with the world of Italian light music. It was the exposure to this kind of music that provided critics with a different *tradition* – one that could be used as a point of

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<sup>32</sup> ‘Muzak’ was originally the name of an American company selling background music for retail shops and public settings. Here the word is used ironically; as a synonym of ‘worthless’ music.

<sup>33</sup> Collettivo redazionale, ‘Autoritratto della muzak generation’, *Muzak*, n. 1, year 1 (October 1973), p. 2.

reference to judge Italian popular culture (as well as to justify the *raison d'être* of a new editorial project). Although the monthlies launched in 1973 and 1974 openly questioned the position of *Ciao 2001* within such tradition (see Chapter 6), all three magazines shared a basic rejection of Italian light music based on familiarity with the recent past of American and British popular music. In this respect, *Gong* – launched in 1974 – situated itself within the same socio-historical narrative discussed so far.

Once upon a time there was Sanremo... a world of flowers, paillettes and light songs (*canzonette*) that had words rhyming with ‘heart’. The press covering this kind of events was all about the lives of celebrities [*spiccioli di cronaca mondana*]. However, the 1960s saw the beat explosion, that strange ‘thing’ coming from England... Suddenly, people in their twenties stopped yawning. During those years, some kids of good will and a few adventurous magazines acted as improvised chroniclers for a youth hungry for new sounds. They provided some information and a lot of cheap myths [*facili miti*]. But the times have changed and the myths have been put back to their right perspective. A new musical culture has emerged and the interests of the youth have become more thoughtful. These are the needs which give birth to *Gong*.<sup>34</sup>

As I go on to discuss in Chapter 7, the evaluation of new American and British pop music acts was frequently performed using this common past as yardstick of evaluation. In this respect, while the high educational attainments of critics provided them with the resources to evaluate pop music along the lines of a highbrow discourse, their generational trajectory provided them with a symbolic capital based on knowledge of American and British rock culture. These are the main cultural resources mobilised by critics in order to define the popular music press as a

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<sup>34</sup> Antonino Antonucci Ferrara, ‘Perché Gong’, *Gong*, n. 6, year 2 (June 1975; booklet enclosed with the issue).

different and autonomous cultural field. However, the last example anticipates an issue that I discuss further in the concluding section. Music magazines also had to define the place of the new field in relation to other institutions involved with the production of discourses about popular music. Put otherwise, they had to take a position vis-à-vis a pre-existing apparatus of music's promotion, which encompassed public radio and television as well as entertainment tabloids – that is, Italy's most popular media.

### 5.3.2 *A different kind of media: economic autonomy and critical expertise*

Although the evaluations of Italian music critics were based on highbrow criteria like authorship and innovation, the field of popular music criticism was not simply defined as a space of autonomy from market constraints as with Bourdieu's literary field (1993, 1996). In this respect, while supporting a different kind of Italian popular culture, music magazines did also claim a different way of being *within* the market. These claims, as I argue below, depend on the fact that music magazines had to define their position vis-à-vis other producers of discourses about popular music. These actors were mostly entertainment tabloids, such as *Sorrisi e Canzoni TV*,<sup>35</sup> and RAI's musical programmes broadcast via radio and television. In relation to these mediators, critics claimed a higher degree of expertise and a different perspective on popular music (see below). Nevertheless, they were fully conscious that such a position could be sustained only through a sufficient amount of economic autonomy, that is through the economic support of both readers and advertisers. Moreover, they conceived of economic capital as necessary to be autonomous both from the

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<sup>35</sup> *Sorrisi e Canzoni TV* was one of the most popular Italian magazine addressing television, radio and popular music. Although never explicitly mentioned by *Ciao 2001* and the monthlies, it was the principal tabloid addressing music celebrities. Between 1971 and 1980 its selling figures grew up to 1.5 million copies per week (Sfardini 2001).

recording industry and *the state*. In other words, since television and radio were the main promotional vehicles of popular music, economic autonomy could be defined as a value to be pursued against the state's monopoly on such media. This is, for example, how *Ciao 2001* differentiated itself from RAI. The symbolic struggle against RAI was indeed between a relative, field-specific economic power, and the power of the state over the largest sector of national cultural production in terms of audience and revenues (Monteleone 2003).

*Ciao 2001* used to present its market success as an irrefutable proof of its own quality, that is as a proof of its critics' expertise about popular music. Significantly, it was the magazine's editor-in-chief, Saverio Rotondi, who signed the position-takings developing such an argument. Rotondi was a journalist in his early forties and the co-owner of *Leti Editore*, the small publisher producing *Ciao 2001*, as well as other products aimed at music enthusiasts (such as biographies of music celebrities – see Prato 1988). His socio-economic critique of RAI emerges with particular clarity in the following example (published in February 1974). Here Rotondi criticises the practices of RAI by attacking its vice-director, Giovanni Salvi, who is held responsible for the low quality of RAI's musical programmes and, more generally, the company's lack of expertise about popular music. However, the critique is not simply about low quality, but about the fact that RAI's musical programmes were *unsuccessful*. The article indeed addresses the fall in popularity of *Canzonissima*; one of RAI's main musical programmes which was eventually shut down in 1975.

Salvi has proven with facts (that is, TV shows) that he is not exactly an expert of his sector. But he is not even a smart guy. Otherwise he would hire some external experts to help him [...] which is what people in charge of other sections of RAI usually do. [...] Such experts may be easily found in the publications and weeklies that cover

entertainment issues [*spettacolo*]. Dear Salvi [...] *a magazine needs to be the best possible product in order to 'sell'. It must give the readers something more than its competitors. This is why a magazine does not employ people who are not experts. On the contrary, on television you can keep working on musical shows, even though you could not distinguish the sound of a violin from the noise of a train. After all, the payment of the television tax [canone] is compulsory and the audience can only get what you make. It does not matter if they will stop watching Canzonissima, you will still be able to keep your position [in RAI].*<sup>36</sup> [my emphasis]

There are a number of elements surfacing in this position-taking. First, Rotondi points to the fact that RAI's monopoly is based on compulsory annual subscriptions, with the network being de facto out of direct market competition. As already mentioned, the rise in RAI's popularity was related to the rise of television as the main entertainment medium in Italy (Monteleone 2003), with the *canone* being the tax that any family owning TV or radio equipment had to pay to the state. In contrast to this arrangement, Rotondi claims an *authentic success* based on direct recognition from the audience. As a result, the fact that the magazine 'sells well' is used as a proof of its quality and critical expertise. The symbolic struggle against RAI, in this respect, was also framed as a fight between professional competence (and meritocracy), and a political elite lacking the competencies to intervene within the musical field. Such a distinction between the innovation fostered by market competition, and poor competence fuelled by political immobilism, was strengthened by the generational distinction already encountered in other examples. As a result, RAI could be constructed as an 'old' institution removed from the demands and needs of the youth culture.

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<sup>36</sup> Saverio Rotondi, 'Si... SALVI chi può!', *Ciao 2001*, n. 6 (10 February 1974), pp. 15-16.

He [Salvi] has held his current position for ages. Salvi carefully avoids any innovation in the sector of television entertainment. He avoids anything which might wake up the audience from the lethargy caused by the recurring cheesy, ‘original’ shows. [...]

Salvi's only concern is to keep away from the screen what he considers the germs of corruption; that is, young people, those with ‘long hair’, who he probably considers drug addicts or worse.<sup>37</sup>

The position of *Ciao 2001* towards RAI did not change during the years under study, despite RAI's major reform in 1975 and the loss of its monopoly on broadcasting frequencies in 1976.<sup>38</sup> From a theoretical point of view, the claims of autonomy of *Ciao 2001*, which frames ‘quality’ and ‘success’ as mutually supportive, problematise Bourdieu's distinction between two mutually exclusive forms of consecration. As discussed in Chapter 3, Bourdieu sees market success (heteronomy) and the recognition provided by a restricted circle of producers and critics (autonomy) as mutually exclusive principles of consecration. Lindberg and colleagues (2005) as well as others (Hesmondhalgh 2006, Banks 2007) have underlined the limitations of such a conceptualisation. The former, for example, have shown that American rock critics escaped a perceived contradiction between creativity and popularity framing ‘authentic success’ as the one gained by ‘true’ artists – a solution which defines success as acting on a meritocratic basis (Lindberg et al 2005: 189, 215). Rotondi used to propose a similar scheme of perception in his position-takings. As a result, his magazine's success was presented as purely meritocratic and proof of its quality. The possibility of such claims, then, depends on

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<sup>37</sup> Saverio Rotondi, *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> A year and a half later, the same critique was replicated by an article addressing another RAI executive. See Saverio Rotondi, ‘Fermate il mondo voglio scendere: al Prof. Finocchiaro Presidente della Rai-TV’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 36 (14 September 1975), p. 9.



*Ciao 2001*'s unique position within the Italian musical field. It was indeed a publication whose success was based on a growing audience of music consumers interested in 'serious' recording artists – the same audience that boosted the album market throughout the 1970s (De Luigi 1982: 53). In this respect, *Ciao 2001* represented an audience that was *both* an economic and cultural avant-garde within the musical field. Similarly, the magazine was endowed with both economic and cultural capital; the former deriving from its revenues and the latter from critics' cultural capital and expertise. As a result, it could pursue a peculiar strategy of 'conversion' (Bourdieu 1996: 116): economic success could be translated into symbolic capital in order to reinforce Rotondi's claims of expertise over RAI (as well as over other music magazines). On the contrary, *Muzak* and *Gong* could not pursue a similar strategy: their cultural expertise could not be validated via market success. This is why they came to define a very different position within the music press (see Chapter 6).

Questions of cultural expertise surface also in articles defining the difference between popular music criticism and the world of tabloids. However, in this case, market success could not be converted into a symbolic capital, since entertainment magazines like *Sorrisi e Canzoni TV* had selling figures that largely outnumbered popular music criticism. As a result, tabloids were simply associated with the 'lower' world of light music as well as with lower cultural practices. For example, while commenting on the 'death' of the musical show *Canzonissima*, Rotondi affirms that he and his readers will not miss the coverage that tabloids provided such events.

[We will not miss] the noise of tabloids' chroniclers, who got out of their usual lethargy as soon as *Canzonissima* started. At 'Delle Vittorie' [theatre] they spent their time feasting and lazing around while telling their readers exclusive stories about

Raffaella's clothes, Topo Gigio's eye colour, Vanoni's perfume or Reitano's secret girlfriend.<sup>39</sup>

What is criticised, here, is the tabloids' focus on the private lives of music and television stars, but also on the most 'superficial' aspects of celebrity, such as the look of music personalities (Ornella Vanoni, Mino Reitano) and TV presenters of *Canzonissima* (Raffaella Carrà, the animated puppet 'Topo Gigio'). Overall, the excerpt associates tabloids with a whole *culture* encompassing light music as well as the icons of national television. As discussed at the end of the previous section, *Gong* framed tabloids in a similar way: they were associated with the coverage of *Sanremo* and with a superficial focus on the lives of celebrities. Music magazines could make such claims of expertise also in relation to more specific events and initiatives. For example, while reviewing a low-price series of albums of American and British rock music, *Ciao 2001* complained that CBS – the record company producing the albums – had established a partnership with a magazine specialising in sport and comics; that is, a 'magazine which has nothing to do with music':

If one does not choose specialised publications [for such initiatives], then we should not be surprised by the [higher] American and English selling figures. In Italy there are a range of recently founded magazines which specialise in avant-garde rock, but they are still considered some sort of idealists or defenders of music that 'does not sell'. This is not true of course: it is sufficient to glance at the charts of other countries. The point is that we need specialists, the proper structures and a lot of good will if we want to change the situation.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Saverio Rotondi, 'Fermate il mondo... voglio scendere: Canzonissima. Requiescat in pace', *Ciao 2001*, n. 25 (29 June 1975), p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> Maria Laura Giulietti, 'Allora, esiste la cultura rock?', *Ciao 2001*, n. 45 (16 November 1975), p.

Positioning itself as an avant-garde *within the market* – and more specifically within a new and potentially growing market – *Ciao 2001* was not simply concerned with supporting the aesthetic edge of rock music, but with further expanding the Italian market for such products and (at least implicitly) its own audience.

The idea that a critical discourse about pop-rock music should take place within existing market structures was supported also by the newer actors of the music press, the monthlies *Muzak* and *Gong*, albeit their position on such questions became more contradictory when they developed a more politicised cultural politics (Chapter 6).

Nevertheless, the early editorials of both magazines show full awareness of the importance of market structures for the very existence of popular music criticism.

Like *Ciao 2001*, they conceived of economic autonomy as a pre-condition for ideological independence and for a serious discussion about music. *Muzak* defined this position across several editorials, with the question being explicitly addressed when the magazine decided to accept advertising from companies external to the musical field.

While reading the current issue, our readers will notice the change from discography-based adverts to a more generic kind of advertising. [...] To receive adverts only from record companies was a risk for our freedom. Indeed a record company may withdraw its adverts if we review one of its bands negatively. Also, they could put pressure on us or make ‘offers’; which could compromise our honesty. On the contrary, how could an airline company or a producer of shoes have any influence? [...] it is well known that advertising is the main source for the life of a magazine. It is the only way to either avoid material death or the compromise of articles being ‘paid’ for by someone

else. [...] You know that we are not here to sell out our ideas [...] we are here to make Muzak a free magazine, one which is independent from the manoeuvres of the recording industry. Also, a magazine which is a space of encounter and discussion; a starting point for new initiatives putting music at the heart of our life.<sup>41</sup>

Like *Muzak*, *Gong* clarified the editorial board's position on such questions in its first editorials.

This is just the beginning... We are strong and reckless, and we want to realise all the things that so far, for lack of pragmatism or realism, have not been attempted in Italy. The important thing is to work seriously and together. The important thing is to not get lost in foggy utopias, and to recognise that certain structures exist. This is why we have to exploit them without asking permission. This monthly will never become a ghetto for a few learned intellectuals [*pennaioli*] writing their own memories as a form of masturbation. This is a space where EVERYONE [sic] is welcome to play its own Gong.<sup>42</sup>

As in other position-takings published during the first months of its inception, the editorial board clarifies that a different way of discussing music can only be pursued within the realm of the 'consumer society', and on the ground provided by the 'cultural industry'.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, being within the market could be framed as a way to escape the elitism of traditional cultural criticism – a risk that both *Gong* and *Muzak* faced as they were developing a more demanding form of criticism that some readers received as both too difficult and elitist (see Chapter 8). Indeed, both magazines had to define their uniqueness through a different strategy to *Ciao 2001*, as they could not

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<sup>41</sup> Collettivo redazionale, 'I soldi di Muzak', *Muzak*, n. 7, year 2 (May 1974), p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Anonymous, *Gong*, n. 2, year 1 (November 1974), p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> Anonymous, *Gong*, n. 1, year 2 (January 1975), p. 7.

claim market success as a validation of their expertise. I will return to their strategies in Chapter 6.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a socio-historical narrative about both the collective trajectory of Italian critics, and the space of possibles they had to face in order to define a new cultural field. Further, it has provided a thick description of the symbolic boundaries through which critics constructed popular music criticism as a young and ‘cosmopolitan’ field devoted to the artistic evaluation of popular music. In this respect, I have analysed the ways in which critics mobilised their cultural capital, as well as their generational experience of American and British rock culture, in order to define new practices and identities vis-à-vis their national (but increasingly globalised) cultural space. By and large, I have argued that this *broader* space of possibles (Chapter 3) shaped the symbolic boundaries that critics drew between different musics, practices and institutions, as well as *within* popular culture. Furthermore, I have argued that the centrality of public television and entertainment tabloids as promotional vehicles of popular music made *economic autonomy* a serious concern for critics, who did not frame it as in contradiction to their cultural autonomy. Indeed, they saw economic autonomy as a means to define new positions within the musical field, and as a viable alternative to the state's control over popular culture. As shown by the case of *Ciao 2001*, market success could even be mobilised as symbolic capital, that is, it could be used as a validation of cultural expertise. Finally, I have argued that although the field was constructed along cultural and generational lines, it was marked by social boundaries which were rarely addressed by critics, at least until their readers did not make them visible (see Chapter 8). To be

‘young, educated and cosmopolitan’, then, meant also being at the ‘centre’ (the north-centre) of Italy's economic development and urbanisation, coming from an upper or middle-class background, and being mostly male.

I will now turn to the institutional differentiation of the field, analysing the strategies through which magazines defined both differences among themselves and different forms of political engagement.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Musical expertise as a political resource: strategies of engagement in the field of popular music criticism**

This chapter explores the relationship between music critics and the political field. More specifically, it analyses the *strategies of engagement* developed by different music magazines vis-à-vis the new forms of political action and protest emerging from Italian civil society throughout the 1970s. From a theoretical point of view, the chapter focuses on the institutional diversification of the music press, exploring the extent to which an ‘unsettled’ political context (Swidler 1986) impacted on the field's autonomy and symbolic economy. I will first provide a historical overview of the forms of political engagement which emerged in 1970s Italy, pointing to the actors involved in what has been considered a politicisation of large sectors of Italian society (Ginsborg 1990, Grisigni 2006). I will then analyse critics' position-takings (Bourdieu 1996) vis-à-vis such space of possibles, and will argue that while they interpreted the historical moment as one of social and political change, they mediated such transformations according to the positions they had established within the music press and, more generally, according to the *cultural logic* of the field. In this respect, critics defined their strategies of engagement on the basis of their capital as both experts of music and representatives of the youth culture. While American rock critics, from the late 1960s, abandoned their counter-cultural activism in order to define rock criticism as autonomous from political aims (Lindberg et al. 2005), Italian critics defined forms of engagement based on the aesthetic autonomy of music and the social primacy of the youth culture. In other words, their engagement was based on the cultural autonomy of popular music criticism from the logic of political

propaganda.

### **6.1 The era of collective action: fields, actors and events**

The former chapter outlined a range of sociocultural transformations that enhanced the emergence of popular music criticism as an autonomous cultural field. Moreover, it focused on the ways in which critics interpreted some of these changes in order to define the symbolic boundaries of the field. However, a further element characterised the space of possibles (Bourdieu 1993, 1995) of the music press between 1973 and 1977, one that fostered the internal differentiation of the field. In this section, I provide a description of what has been called ‘era of collective action’ (Ginsborg 1990), ‘season of movements’ (Grispigni 2006) and ‘long 1968’ (Foot 2010). This period of Italian history witnessed the emergence of forms of collective protest involving different social groups and new political subjects. It covered the years between the students' protests of 1967-1968 and the assassination, in 1978, of Italian ex-prime minister Aldo Moro by the terrorist organisation *Brigate Rosse* (Red Brigades). There is a constellation of structural and cultural factors that shaped the 1970s as a season of intense political struggle. Here I mention those that have been considered pivotal within existing historical research, while the analysis of critics' position-takings (Sections 2 and 3) will shed further light on the ways in which they interpreted and mediated such external changes.

Between 1967 and 1968, a large movement of students occupied the universities of several Italian North-Centre cities,<sup>1</sup> with disorders spreading quickly to Southern cities and to the secondary schools of the main urban areas (Ginsborg 1990: 303). However, rather than remaining a students' affair, forms of struggle arose also among

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<sup>1</sup> The first Italian universities to be occupied were Trento, Milan, Turin and Rome (Ginsborg 1990).



blue collar workers and within other sectors of production, with collective action becoming a means to demand change in different spheres of Italian society. A key factor contributing to this scenario was the lack of structural reforms in many areas of Italian society, which had remained untouched, despite the fast urbanisation and industrialisation of the country during the 1960s. The occupation of universities, for example, was fostered by a system still unequipped for the expansion of secondary and higher education. Italian universities were characterised by lack of spaces, professional teachers and grants to support students in need. Moreover, a system based on oral lectures and oral examinations contributed to make attendance particularly difficult for working students, who had part-time jobs in order to make university affordable.<sup>2</sup> Such a situation produced a high number of drop-outs and, according to Ginsborg (1990), a ‘particularly subtle form of class-based selection: the university was supposedly open to all, but the odds were heavily stacked against poorer students ever getting a degree.’ (*ibid.*, p. 300).

Subsequent demands in the sectors of production were fostered by similar tensions. For example, while contributing to the growth of Italian industrial production, young manufacturing workers migrating from Southern regions lived in poor conditions in Northern suburban areas and did not have the same rights and benefits of older blue-collar workers. This situation fostered a massive wave of strikes leading to the so-called ‘hot autumn’ in 1969, which saw students joining the protests of blue collar workers. The unresolved contradictions of the Italian fast economic miracle fuelled forms of political upheaval in other sectors of production between the 1969 and 1973:

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<sup>2</sup> According to Ginsborg (*ibid.*, p. 299) working students were more than a half of the whole students' population by 1968, with most of them working part-time in schools, bars and restaurants; or as salesmen and baby-sitters.

After the metalworkers, it was the turn of chemical and building workers, railwaymen and other sections of organized labour. Agitations spilled out of the major workplaces into the minor ones, and out of industry into the tertiary sector. Many white-collar workers and technicians went on strike for the first time. Public-sector workers – postmen, teachers, hospital workers, civil servants, etc. – also moved on to the offensive. (*ibid.*, p. 318).

Civil society also witnessed the emergence of new practices of engagement aimed at improving both standards of living and rights of citizenship. For example, a national movement struggled to improve the conditions of housing in the main cities between 1968 and 1973, demanding fair rents on a national scale (*ibid.*, pp. 323-325). More generally, members of civil society contributed to the improvement of existing services and spaces of socialisation with: ‘‘red’’ markets, kindergartens, restaurants, surgeries, social clubs, etc., [which] opened (and often shut) one after another.’ (*ibid.*)

A variety of actors contributed to the struggles of the 1970s. Among them there were trade unions, new political groups born between 1968-69 (the so-called ‘revolutionary left’) and new social movements such as the feminist movement, which gained national visibility especially from late 1975 onwards. The influence of these groups varied depending on the field: trade unions were very influential in many sectors of production, while revolutionary groups were strong among students, in the army and in the major factories of the North (*ibid.*, pp. 360-361). Although significant episodes of organised protest arose in the South (*ibid.*, pp. 337-340) it was in the North-Centre that the aforementioned groups, as well as the Italian Communist Party, were stronger and able to mobilise larger groups of people (Gundle 2000: 141).

While structural problems and inequalities have been considered key factors to understand the Italian ‘long’ 1968, cultural factors also informed the demands of students and young workers. In this respect, some mediated national and international events had profound impact on them. For example, the protests against the Vietnam war in the US helped to shape a critical image of American society – a perception which music critics themselves inherited and contributed to reproduce.<sup>3</sup> China's Cultural Revolution also made a great impression on students and political activists. More generally, during these years leftist activists came to believe that capitalism was in a state of decline, if not close to its defeat (Gundle 2000: 138-164) – a perspective made concrete by the international oil crisis of 1973 and the stagflation of the Italian economy (which lasted for the whole decade). As I discuss below, the perception of a changing Italian society informed also the arguments of music critics about the need for political action. It is also worth considering, then, that since the late 1960s new interpretations of Marxism informed the views of the students' movement. In this respect, a high number of journals supporting a heterogeneous Marxist culture emerged throughout the 1970s (Mangano 1998). By the early 1970s, then, Theodor Adorno's critique of mass culture had become very influential on Italian intellectuals, as well as on some segments of the music industry (Santoro 2010b: 157-158). One of the music monthlies emerging in these years (*Muzak*) even mentioned Adorno as a key inspiration for its project of politically-informed music criticism.<sup>4</sup> Although such cultural resources were not accessible to Italian citizens at large, they spread significantly among students and activists. It is therefore not surprising that music critics – being for the most part students and

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<sup>3</sup> See the excerpts about Woodstock and ‘American style’ concerts in Section 6.3.3, but also the way critics received African American free jazz (Chapter 7).

<sup>4</sup> Giaime Pintor, ‘Per il pop suo malgrado’, *Muzak*, n. 10-11, August-September 1974, p. 46. See also Castaldo et al. (1978: 7-8).

graduates close to the centres of the mobilisation (Chapter 5) – were exposed to such resources and to the broader climate of engagement.

### *6.1.1 Musical and cultural activism*

During these years a number of political actors defined distinctive lines of intervention about cultural production and consumption, thus questioning the very idea of culture as a realm autonomous from political demands. For example, political parties and groups – most notably the Communist Party and revolutionary groups – were active in the organisation of cultural and musical events (Gundle 2000), and groups belonging to the so-called ‘underground’ considered live concerts a primary arena of political intervention (Echaurren and Salaris 1999).<sup>5</sup> In this respect, the group *Stampa Alternativa* (Alternative Press) argued that music had to be freely available and not controlled by tour organisers and record companies. As a result, the group offered ‘ideological support to groups that attacked concert venues (where security, at the time, was almost non-existent) to get ‘free music’’ (Fabbri 2007: 412). More generally, between 1971 and 1979 concerts became a site of political struggle in Italy: the police had to frequently fight against groups willing to access the venues without paying for a ticket or to protest against musicians deemed lacking a political consciousness (Prato 2010: 332-333). Eventually, after some Molotov bombs had been thrown on the stage of Carlos Santana's concert in Milan (1977), Italy was avoided by foreign acts until 1979 (Fabbri 2007).

As anticipated in Chapter 4, such actions and events created an *overlap* between the cultural and political field, with political stakes and categories of perception (Bourdieu 1993, 1996) informing practices such as music-making (Fiori 1984), the

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<sup>5</sup> The politicisation of the musical field was also supported by some Italian musicians and singer-songwriters who developed explicitly ‘political’ aesthetics during these years. See Fiore (1984), Fabbri (2007) and Prato (2010) for an overview about music production.

organisation of live concerts and music criticism (see below). Another important actor contributing to this scenario was the counter-cultural magazine *Re Nudo*. With the help of some revolutionary groups, the magazine was able to organise an annual music festival in Milan (*Parco Lambro*), which became a major event for the Italian youth culture;<sup>6</sup> one that was regularly reviewed by music magazines between 1973 and 1976.<sup>7</sup> As I argue in the next sections, both *Stampa Alternativa* and *Re Nudo*, along with political parties and groups, were seen by music critics as the carriers of a dubious cultural politics – one that did not take music's aesthetic qualities and cultural autonomy sufficiently into account.

## **6.2 Popular music criticism and the genesis of political engagement**

### *6.2.1 Organisational breaks and the struggle over the youth culture*

As shown in Chapter 5, the symbolic boundaries of popular music criticism had a markedly generational character. The music press was a ‘youth space’ sustained by a generation of educated Italians between their early twenties and early thirties. As I argue in this section, the institutional diversification of the field was pursued turning the youth into a ground for symbolic struggle. Put otherwise, newly launched magazines such as *Muzak* and *Gong* claimed to be either ‘more authentic’ representatives of youth culture, or representatives of a ‘smarter’ fraction of such culture. As a result, a social distinction shared by different field actors (youth vs.

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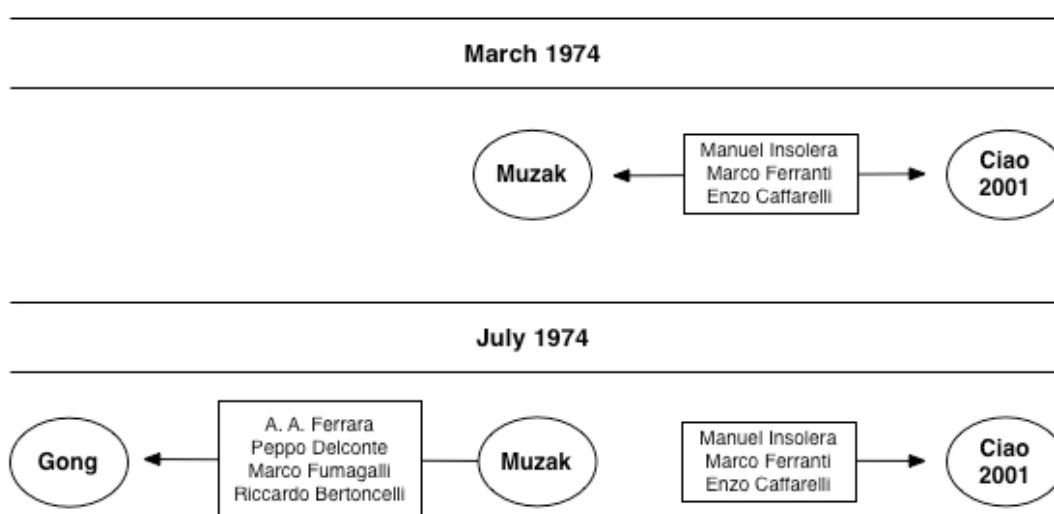
<sup>6</sup> According to Andrea Valcarengi (founder of *Re Nudo* and among the festival's organisers), the festival's last edition (1976) had an audience of approximately 120,000 people in four days. See Daniele Caroli, ‘Parco Lambro. Tirando le somme’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 32-33, 15-22 August 1976, pp. 37-38.

<sup>7</sup> The main institutions of the underground were based in Milan (*Re Nudo*) and Rome (*Stampa Alternativa*). However, the Italian counterculture was a relatively spread phenomenon, which was supported by a variety of initiatives ranging from hand-made ‘zines (Ciaponi 2007) to groups that remained active for most part of the 1970s.

elders) progressively became the ground for a symbolic struggle between different editorial projects.

Initially, the people who contributed to the creation of *Muzak* (and later *Gong*) simply established a new magazine whose purposes were similar to those of *Ciao 2001*, that is, to advocate for the cultural value of popular music styles consumed mostly by young people. Until March 1974, *Muzak* also shared some critics with *Ciao 2001*: Enzo Caffarelli, Marco Ferranti and Manuel Insolera (all of them writing regularly for the weekly between 1973 and 1977). However, the diversification of the field was accompanied by a series of *organisational breaks* within the magazines' editorial boards (**table 6.1**).

**Table 6.1 - Main organisational breaks**



After Caffarelli, Ferranti and Insolera had left *Muzak* early in 1974, another group of critics left it in order to establish *Gong*. With the end of 1974, then, *Ciao 2001*, *Muzak* and *Gong* emerged as different positions with clearly distinct editorial projects.

The newly established monthlies challenged *Ciao 2001*, claiming to provide a more authentic representation of youth culture. In this respect, as early as August 1974 *Muzak* blamed the field's main player for manipulating the image of its readership and for giving a 'paternalistic' representation of Italian young music fans. In contrast, *Muzak* invited its readers to participate in the publication of a 'counter-book' (*contro-libro*) that would truly reflect their views and, by extension, the perspectives of Italian youth.

We know that you are not as stupid as people like Caffarelli [*Ciao 2001* writer] makes you look like through their 'open-to-the-reader' sections (that is, sections open to those readers who please the editors). [...] Since our impression is that you are smart people [*persone sveglie*], what about a counter-book against all the ghettos? A counter-book against all the ghettos in which we have been jailed by idiotic little magazines and where music is just escapism [*evasione*], dullness [*stordimento*], idiocy. [...] We will show them that being young is not simply about blue-jeans, high heels, long hair, rings and coloured scarves, but is about people living with distinctive problems and realities, and who deserve a better life. [...] We will show these paternalist provincials that we are capable of constructing our own life, morality and culture, and that we are able to analyse them.<sup>8</sup>

Through this article, the editorial board (the 'we' speaking) claims an *insider* perspective into the everyday life of Italian youth. By contrast, it frames *Ciao 2001* as a paternalistic and 'provincial'<sup>9</sup> media which, as such, is unable to look into the social reality and problems of young people. Moreover, *Ciao 2001* is framed as a

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<sup>8</sup> Collettivo redazionale, 'Muzakcontrolibro', *Muzak*, n. 10-11, August-September 1974, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Implicitly, critics were also struggling over different ways of being 'cosmopolitan'. In this respect, *Ciao 2001* could be construed as provincial and paternalistic, that is, as *closer* to the Italian popular culture it claimed to reject.

magazine which turns a music ‘culture’ into a ‘ghetto’, thus disconnecting music from the broader social contexts of its production and consumption (a question to which I return in the Section 6.3). It is significant that *Ciao 2001* was addressed via the person of Enzo Caffarelli, a music critic who had worked for both the magazines until March of that same year (1974). As already argued, the field, at this stage, was developing mutually opposing positions, and the monthlies were proposing themselves as alternative cultural projects to *Ciao 2001*. In this respect, the insider position proposed by *Muzak* contrasts markedly with the way in which *Ciao 2001* used to address its readers. In fact, when answering to the readers' letters (Chapter 8) or defining the line of the magazine, Saverio Rotondi (editor-in-chief of *Ciao 2001*) did not hide his *outsider* position. A forty-year old in 1973, Rotondi used to stress his older age as a sign of experience. As he told to his readers in October 1973: ‘it's been three years since I started managing this magazine [...] I still do it with the enthusiasm of an age which, luckily enough, makes it possible for me to stay close to the ideas of young generations.’<sup>10</sup> Different positions within the field, thus, also mirrored broader social differences, with the founding members of both *Muzak* and *Gong* (i.e. people born mostly between the late 1940s and mid-1950s) attacking and older (and hence ‘false’) representatives of the youth culture. A few months after *Muzak* had challenged *Ciao 2001*, the newly-launched *Gong* also claimed to represent a different and ‘smarter’ youth culture, with the magazine being defined as a means to accomplish a more critical and aware relationship with music.

This is Gong's second year within consumer society. The battle has just begun and perhaps we are impaired [...]. We do not need to agree on everything, but we have to remember that music (and culture) is lived day-by-day as an *active and conscious*

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<sup>10</sup> Saverio Rotondi, ‘Conosciamoci meglio’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 45, 11 November 1973, p. 4-5.



*choice*. We do not have to feel obliged by misplaced aspirations, or hungriness, *to eat music as fast as a sandwich*, just between one swindle and another.<sup>11</sup> [my emphasis]

A subsequent editorial explicitly defined this audience as different from the typical readers of *Ciao 2001*, who were parodied for being too involved in their ‘consumeristic trip’.<sup>12</sup> The idea of a more self-conscious music consumer to be represented was also stressed while presenting the findings of a survey about the magazine's audience, which *Gong* had commissioned through an external marketing agency (*Simark*). The narrative presenting the survey defines *Gong* as the new avant-garde within the field and remarks that its audience is a more ‘thoughtful’ youth culture.

Times have changed [...] a new musical culture has emerged and the interests of the youth have become more thoughtful. These are the needs which give birth to *Gong*. A monthly whose editorial line and visual design have no precedents in Italy. A magazine which has been able to gather the best names among young experts of music, but also among experts of movies, performing arts, and all the sociocultural issues that affect the younger generations [...] *Gong* is today an indispensable means for anyone willing to participate actively in a changing culture and society.<sup>13</sup>

As shown by such examples, music magazines struggled over the meaning of youth in order to define alternative positions within the field. However, claiming to be more authentic representatives of the youth was only the early stage of a broader process of institutional diversification. In this respect, in order to develop fully-

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<sup>11</sup> Anonymous, *Gong*, n. 1, year 2<sup>nd</sup>, January 1975, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Antonino Antonucci Ferrara, ‘Scherzi da prete e consumismo’, *Gong*, n. 12, year 2<sup>nd</sup>, December 1975, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Antonino Antonucci Ferrara, ‘Perché Gong’, *Gong*, n. 6, year 2, June 1975; booklet attached to the issue.

fledged cultural projects, the monthlies did not simply take a position vis-à-vis *Ciao 2001* and its role within the Italian youth, but developed a different understanding of the role of popular music criticism within Italian society at large. The next section explores the ways in which both *Gong* and *Muzak* drew from a broader space of possibles – i.e. the climate of political activism and mobilisation – in order to define their editorial projects as both cultural and political.

### *6.2.2 A broader space of possibles: the reception of political struggles*

Both *Muzak* and *Gong* started reflecting on the role of popular music criticism in light of what they perceived to be a ‘changing culture and society’.<sup>14</sup> In this respect, the climate of mobilisation, and the presence of political actors acting as concert organisers within the musical field, worked as both enablements and constraints for music critics. On the one hand, editorial boards actively chose to engage with specific organisations and events in order to define distinctive forms of engagement. On the other hand, the field at large could not ignore a phenomenon that was affecting the musical field and the life of the magazines' audience, as shown also by the way *Ciao 2001* addressed the politicisation of the youth culture (see Section 6.3.3). Here I focus on critics' perception and interpretation of this broader and changing space of possibles, while the next section will show how the magazines' pre-existing history and position within the field informed their approach to political engagement.

In July 1974 *Muzak* warned the readers about ‘a more direct engagement with the reality beyond our professional realm’,<sup>15</sup> a decision which had followed the organisational break with *Ciao 2001* and with the people who were going to set up

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Collettivo redazionale, ‘Winds of change’, *Muzak*, n. 9, July 1974, p. 3.

*Gong*:

There has been a lot of discussion within the editorial board. Some people were satisfied with the existing line. However, some of us wanted a more concrete engagement with current social problems [...] particularly we want to cover a broader scope of arguments.<sup>16</sup>

The magazine's idea of deeper engagement with social reality became overtly political throughout 1975 and 1976. In October 1974, the editorial board already addressed what some readers had perceived as a 'political turn' in the magazine's line, framing such change as 'growing up', that is, a further step in the definition of *Muzak* as a cultural project:

Growing up means facing social and political issues and stop conceiving of music as a cheerful game. This is the meaning of what someone has called (improperly) our 'political turn'. The point is not to start doing politics, but *to represent, within a broad progressive front [...] the views and perspectives of youth culture – a culture which is progressive by its own nature.*<sup>17</sup> [my emphasis]

The existence of this 'broad progressive front', and the perception of living in a moment of historical change, were both elements that *Muzak* mobilised as a source of explanation and legitimation for its own choice.

Probably all of you, *during these days of abrupt change*, have had some thoughts about your own role, about your awareness and degree of contribution to changing

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Collettivo redazionale, 'Muzakcompleanno: verso il futuro', *Muzak*, n. 12, October 1974, p. 2.

things. This is what happened to us, as you have probably noticed. Initially we just wanted to deconstruct a false and distorted ideology about music. *But then we found ourselves within a different reality, a different world and a different society.*<sup>18</sup> [my emphasis]

The perception of a different world, which in turn is related to the perception of a different, ‘progressive’ youth culture, is what the critics founding *Gong* described just a few months after the magazine had been launched. In both cases, critics were articulating the feeling of a broadened space of possibles. Put otherwise, changes that were external to the field were received by critics as an *opportunity* to rethink the social role of popular music criticism. As shown by the following example, *Gong* expressed both closeness to the emerging movement, and framed it as an antidote to the spread of neo-fascist violence at live concerts and within Italian society.

Bars and billiard balls have recently been admitted within theatres and stadiums; sometimes demagogically presented as a means to get ‘free music’ [...]. It seems that a similar destiny of catastrophe and destruction must overturn the political arena, culture, the arts, education and everything: this is what Almirante's supporters [Italian neo-fascist party] have decided. [...] In Rome the climate is oppressing. Whole neighbourhoods are in the hands of gangs, there have been countless fights in front of schools [...]. However, if Fascism now stays away from schools, it is because students are creating new forms of struggle. Similarly, it stays away from factories because workers [*operai*] have a voice over production and their salaries. It stays away from neighbourhoods because people are inventing day-by-day new forms of direct participation (neighbourhood committees, circles, music clubs, theatres, self-managed

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<sup>18</sup> Collettivo redazionale, ‘Utilità di Muzak’, *Muzak*, n. 13, November 1974, p. 2.

kindergarten...).<sup>19</sup>

The name of Giorgio Almirante is another reference to a concrete actor involved with the mobilisations of the 1970s, albeit as an antagonist. Almirante was indeed the Secretary of the neo-fascist party M.S.I. (Italian Social Movement), which in 1972 was able to obtain a significant 8.7 per cent of the votes for the national elections (Ginsborg 1990: 336). The broader space of possibles, then, included potential allies as well as enemies to be fought. In this respect, a few months after the aforementioned article *Gong* strengthened its anti-fascist identity, and position *within* the movement, with a brief editorial about the murder of several left-wing activists under Francisco Franco's regime in Spain.

The editors, writers and typographers of *Gong* join all the democrats in mourning and reconfirm their militant engagement [*impegno*] for the defeat of Europe's last fascist dictatorship. Thanks to the rise of the popular masses, Europe has finally found a unifying moment of anti-fascism. *Gong* will employ any occasion and means in order to ensure that the blood of our young Spanish and Basque comrades has not been wasted.<sup>20</sup>

Overall, following a path very similar to that of *Muzak*, the magazine redefined its public identity vis-à-vis what was perceived as a moment of historical change, both for Italy and Europe. Moreover, while the monthlies did mention the general climate of change as a justification for their *impegno*, they also mentioned specific events perceived as turning-points. For example, on the 12th and 13th May 1975, a national referendum was held in order to decide about the abrogation of divorce from Italian

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<sup>19</sup> Antonino Antonucci Ferrara, 'Basta con i fascisti', *Gong*, n. 4, year 2<sup>nd</sup>, April 1975, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Anonymous, *Gong*, n. 10, year 2<sup>nd</sup>, October 1975, p. 3.

civil rights (despite the fact that legal divorce had been introduced in Italian law only in 1972). The referendum was eventually defeated, with almost 60 per cent of votes supporting 'no' to the abrogation. *Muzak* framed this event as proof of the fact that Italian society was changing. Moreover, critics saw the referendum as part of a broader network of events and actors, all of them conceived of as a leverage toward social change. Among such actors and events, the article mentions the rise of the Feminist movement and its efforts to turn the legalisation of abortion into an issue of public debate.<sup>21</sup>

The referendum of May 12<sup>th</sup> has confirmed that the efforts of this movement are not destined to an eternal defeat. Feminism and sexual liberation; abortion and drugs; the youth and its critique to the institutions – *these things are all entwined together and have changed the role of music*. [Music] is no longer the warm and silly shelter for people who neither fight nor live. [Music] has become a further reason to stay together, count each other and live moments – albeit partial – of freedom [*festa*].<sup>22</sup> [my emphasis]

Other events framed as turning-points by music magazines were the local elections of 1975 and the national ones of 1976. Both elections signalled a higher degree of institutional power for the Communist Party, which became the second political force after the Christian Democrats (DC). The monthlies perceived these elections as positive moments of change for Italian democracy. For *Gong*, the elections could

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<sup>21</sup> In Italy abortion remained illegal until 1978. However, in 1975 Italian constitutional law introduced a distinction between embryos and human life, and defined the health of mothers as more important than the life of embryos. That same year the Movement of Liberation of Italian Women (MDL) and the Radical Party organised a collection of signatures for a referendum to legalise abortion, which gathered 800,000 signatures. According to Ginsborg, women's mobilisation about abortion 'was able to transform it from an important civil rights question into a wide-ranging discussion on women's position in Italian society' (Ginsborg 1990: 369).

<sup>22</sup> Giaime Pintor, 'Contrappunti ai fatti: musica in movimento', *Muzak*, n. 5 (new series), September 1975, p. 7.

lead to the defeat of the Democratic-Christian 'regime'. It is significant, in this respect, that the following article mentions the 'strategy of tension'. According to this political and journalistic thesis, the rise of far-right terrorism in Italy had been manoeuvred by the Italian secret services and political elites. More specifically, Democratic Christians were using public tragedies such as the bombs exploded in Piazza Fontana (Milan, 1969) and Piazza della Loggia (Brescia, 1974) as justifications for a more conservative and authoritarian government.

Two themes have reemerged during the pre-electoral days: the strategy of tension and the economic crisis. The Demo-Christian regime is managing its own agony with rage and impotence [...] they want to push the electorate towards emotional choices, rather than towards a political choice based on rationality. [...] The existing system, whose arrogance and corruption have been paid for by the working class and the youth proletariat [*proletariato giovanile*] is losing. Because the Movement gets stronger and better organised each day.<sup>23</sup>

*Muzak* also framed the elections as a decisive historical moment in its last issue.

The vote of 20<sup>th</sup> June [1976] will be the most significant in the last thirty years of the Republic. [...] It will be important because the popular masses will remark what they already affirmed on 12th May [divorce referendum] and 15th June [1975; regional elections]. [...] This tendency towards the left, which appeared weak in 1972, nowadays emerges as a certainty. It is not a simple tendency anymore.<sup>24</sup>

Although the elections of 1976 did not lead to an overturn of the DC (it remained the

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<sup>23</sup> Anonymous, *Gong*, n. 5, year 3<sup>rd</sup>, May 1976, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Giaime Pintor, 'Contrappunti ai fatti: All'ombra delle lotte e dentro le urne', *Muzak*, n. 13 (new series), June 1976, pp. 8-9.

first party), events like the elections and the divorce referendum, along with the broader climate of mobilisation, acted as *emotional* and *cultural resources* for music critics. On the one hand, they informed their perceptions, their choices and (as far as we know) their feelings. On the other hand, they could be publicly mobilised to justify a changing cultural politics and its groundedness in the national-historical space, that is, its cultural and social relevance.

However, these external events were also mediated by the magazines according to their position within the music press as a cultural field. In this respect, being newly established organisations with a small audience, *Muzak* and *Gong* considered political mobilisation as an opportunity. In contrast, while framing the aforementioned events as positive changes for Italian democracy,<sup>25</sup> *Ciao 2001* defined a stronger degree of autonomy from politics. The magazine was indeed interested in representing the youth culture as a whole, not just its more politicised fringes (i.e. a niche audience).

### 6.3 Three strategies of engagement

As I have discussed so far, the emergence of new social movements and forms of collective engagement informed the ways in which the music press conceived of its role within Italian society. However, there are strong institutional differences in the way music magazines developed their own forms of political action. As I shall argue below, the monthlies positioned themselves *within* the movement and developed two specific strategies of engagement. First, they defined a *politics of music* which consisted of a sociological critique of the capitalist organisation of live concerts.

Second, they defined what I call a *musical politics*, that is, they argued that music's

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<sup>25</sup> Domenico Dante, '15 giugno 1975. L'Italia ha voltato pagina', *Ciao 2001*, n. 25, 29 June 1975, p. 15-16; Adriano Ruocco, '1975-76 Scuolaortobiezionedroga', *Ciao 2001*, n. 1, 11 January 1976, pp. 13-14.



aesthetic power was political in itself, as it could positively shape the sensibility of people and, by extension, society. In contrast to such strategies, *Ciao 2001* saw political engagement as just *one* possible relationship with music – one that should rule out neither a more ‘escapist’ way of listening,<sup>26</sup> nor the market as an institution mediating music production and consumption.

### 6.3.1 *The politics of music*

The monthlies defined their politics of music mostly through articles addressing the pop and jazz festivals that were being organised in Italy by actors such as professional organisers, regional authorities, political and counter-cultural groups. Live music, along with recorded music, was the main channel of music consumption at the time; it is therefore not surprising that critics were concerned with both the organisation and contents of live events. Moreover, as discussed earlier, live concerts were both a sector in which political actors were very active as organisers, and a site of struggles between an audience claiming ‘free music’, private organisers and police forces. *Muzak* and *Gong* thus defined a politics of music that was autonomous from the positions of both professional organisers, political and counter-cultural groups. A key argument of the monthlies was the necessity to exclude private organisers from the management of concerts in order to create self-managed and independent musical events with the support of other forces in the movement. *Muzak* started by defining this position with an article about the *Santamonica Festival* – a music event which had been cancelled by the local authorities of Forlì in order to prevent disorders and clashes. While *Ciao 2001* attacked the local authorities for denying the

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<sup>26</sup> On the ‘cultural tolerance’ of *Ciao 2001* and different ways of engaging with music, see also Chapter 8.

youth culture a long-awaited event,<sup>27</sup> *Muzak* focused on the festival's organisers, framing them as people 'who manage [live music] with the only purpose of maximising their profits'.<sup>28</sup> The idea that private organisers could be effectively excluded from the musical field was supported, again, by the perception of a changing society and youth culture. It is from this standpoint that *Muzak*, along with *Gong*, used to attack the biggest organisers of pop concerts in Italy: Franco Mamone, Francesco Sanavio and David Zard.

Mamone's dubious role as merchant of culture is being undermined partly by the corruption and competition of the [live] business, and partly by a changed social reality, [that is] by the desires and will of a youth who wants to count something. [As a result] this is not a market anymore, or at least it cannot be managed according to common market rules [...] The 'capitalist' organisation of culture is seriously in danger.<sup>29</sup>

*Gong* expressed a similar line in relation to another important gig: Lou Reed's concert in Rome (15 February 1975). As with the *Santamonica Festival*, the event was eventually cancelled, but this time it happened after the police had shot tear-gas directly into the audience. According to *Muzak*, the accident was a punishment orchestrated by the organisers in order to 'give a lesson' to the protesters, who had been able to break down the venue's gates and turn the concert into a free event.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, *Gong* framed the event as proof of the fact that private organisers could no longer operate within the Italian musical field.

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<sup>27</sup> Anonymous, 'Da Santamonica: la stangata', *Ciao 2001*, n. 31, 4 August 1974, pp. 15-17.

<sup>28</sup> Giaime Pintor, 'Festival Aleatori', *Muzak*, n. 10-11, August-September, 1974, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Collettivo redazionale, 'Lettera aperta al ministro dello spettacolo', *Muzak*, n. 1 (new series), April 1975, p. 7.

From 1974 onwards, few foreign names have attempted the world's most difficult stadiums: the Italian ones. We have had few and far-from-exciting gigs (Zappa, Genesis, Soft Machine) and a disaster without precedent (Lou Reed), which has [financially] destroyed the poor [David] Zard. [...] Those who believed that big American-style events could work here were wrong. These people had bet on the ingenuity and enthusiasm of the youth. However, they had to deal with under-developed structures, but also with the growing politicisation [of the youth] and opposition to both their methods and prices.<sup>31</sup>

Like *Muzak*, *Gong* saw the alternative to private organisers in self-managed events organised with the support of political forces. This position, which was informed by Marxist categories of perception, meant to reject the 'alienated' dimension of the stadium imposed by organisers, but also the ideology of free music advocated by underground groups like *Stampa Alternativa*.

We do not ask for 'free' concerts [...] we ask for direct participation in the management of music and for control over the organisation in order to rule out private organisers and their logic. [...] we want to impose our needs rather than awaiting the organisers' scraps. We want to live in a new culture, not to gain a 'free' place within the theatre of alienation.<sup>32</sup>

The argument against the free music movement must be considered in light of the broader system of similarities and differences that critics were constructing with such

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<sup>31</sup> Peppo Delconte, Roberto Masotti, 'Inchiesta Gong. I nuovi circuiti alternativi musicali. La lunga marcia', *Gong*, n. 10, year 2<sup>nd</sup>, October 1975, pp. 9-12.

<sup>32</sup> Anonymous, 'Allonsanfan – contro cultura. Per uscire dal caos', *Gong*, n. 2, year 2<sup>nd</sup>, February 1975, p. 56.

position-takings. Although the movement and its actors were considered natural allies by critics, they were also criticised for lacking specific expertise – that is, cultural capital – about musical issues. In this respect, the free music movement was criticised for two main reasons. On the one hand, it was deemed as devoid of concrete organisational proposals, and thus incompatible with the organisation of an actual network of alternative musical events. On the other hand, it was a movement that did not have any coherent position about the aesthetic qualities of music. In contrast to the ideology of free music, *Gong* proposed fair pay to artists willing to support alternative events, arguing that: ‘no one can live off air; professionalism is an uncomfortable but unavoidable reality’.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, a politics of music had to be based on clear *cultural* hierarchies. In contrast, the free music movement:

confuses excellent sound with despicable shit. [As a result] both inconsistent initiatives and genuine alternative projects have been boycotted through the ‘free music’ fetish.<sup>34</sup>

Such allegations were supported also by *Muzak*. It similarly argued that self-managed music concerts needed concrete organisational efforts in order to be a viable alternative to official concerts, which – by contrast – the magazine conceived of as ‘concentration camps’ (*lager*).

Those who call themselves ‘alternative people’ need to face reality, a reality which cannot be tackled with abstract principles like ‘music is ours, let's get it back!’. It is not about showing to official organisers [...] that one is able to organise a free festival

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

with few good bands [...] It is about start working seriously to make such concerts real: self-managed but real. Neither concentration camps (*lager*) nor clouds in the sky of pure ideas.<sup>35</sup>

In essence, the monthlies were pursuing a strategy of *distinction* in relation to those political and counter-cultural actors, who were intervening in musical issues. This strategy stressed higher expertise about the organisation of music and, as I further discuss below, about aesthetic matters.

Another event raising the concerns of critics was the festival *Parco Lambro* organised by the zine *Re Nudo* in Milan. As already mentioned, *Parco Lambro* was the most successful initiative associated with the counterculture, and the position of *Muzak* and *Gong* towards the event was ambivalent. It is in relation to such events that they clearly expressed the second pillar of their politics of music: alternative musical events should promote a different and more socially aware way of *being together*. In this respect, the 1975 edition of *Parco Lambro* was framed by *Gong* as a success. In contrast to the American festival Woodstock, which was defined as ‘an old and empty ritual’,<sup>36</sup> *Parco Lambro* was seen as expressing:

a contradictory but genuine muddle of pressing needs. People wanted to take music back for themselves, but they also wanted to understand something more. They wanted to stay with their peers and gain awareness about the urgent problems of these pre-electoral days [...] [At the festival] people could see different realities and the problems that affect all of us; perhaps they could even become more aware of the

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<sup>35</sup> Giaime Pintor, ‘Festival Aleatori’, *Muzak*, n. 10-11, August-September, 1974, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> Antonino Antonucci Ferrara, ‘Musica e candelotti. La festa di Re Nudo’, *Gong*, n. 7-8, year 2<sup>nd</sup>, August-September 1975, pp. 31-32.

ambiguity and contradictions of such problems.<sup>37</sup>

As shown by this example, taking music back from private organisers was not enough for the monthlies. Alternative events had to be also moments of critical awareness and discovery of the social realities and problems shaping both music and the youth culture. *Muzak* made the same point while reviewing the same edition of *Parco Lambro*. However, it was more critical about the outcome of the festival, which was seen as affected by a ‘consumerist’ attitude and too close to a traditional symbol of Italian popular culture – the *feste dell'Unità* (festivals of unity) organised by the Communist Party from the mid-1940s onwards.

We had the poignant feeling that there, among closed fists and red drapes, we were part of something that is already strong. However, progress needs criticism. Walking among the crowd, the feeling of being grown-up was replaced by the less exciting feeling of being big enough to have our own *festa dell'Unità*, albeit with the Ukrain Brèžnev-style overshoes replaced by a good imitation of Jack Kerouac's American sandals. It is the same consumerist mechanism: the symbols change but the soul of commerce remains intact.<sup>38</sup>

For *Muzak*, such events had to raise political awareness and promote more authentic social relationships. In contrast, the article stresses new symbols of consumerism such as the ‘Jack Kerouac-style’ sandals. In this respect, the risk was that an old consumerist mentality might turn alternative events into: ‘just entertainment, musical show, old culture confused with the new one’.<sup>39</sup> To be sure, such attacks on

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Lidia Ravera, ‘Juke-box al prosciutto’, *Muzak*, n. 4 (new series), July 1975, pp. 35-36.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

consumerism and market forces never translated into an *actual* refusal of the market at large. The monthlies were still very conscious that their own existence depended on a minimum of economic autonomy (see Chapter 5). As a result, both *Muzak* and *Gong* remained commercial enterprises based on the economic support of readers and advertisers.<sup>40</sup> Their *selective* attack on market forces, then, can be seen as a form of negotiation, a way to reclaim a relative space of autonomy for a new musical culture. As with other instances of contemporary cultural production (Hesmondhalgh 2006, Banks 2007), their autonomy from market forces was thus based on both negotiations and contradictions.

As discussed in this section, the construction of an alternative network of musical events, which could promote political awareness and new social relationships, was the tenet of the monthlies' politics of music. However, as anticipated above, *Muzak* and *Gong* were also concerned with the *contents* of such initiatives. In this respect, they developed a second strategy of engagement, which may be defined as a *musical politics*. While the *politics of music* framed political and counter-cultural actors as allies lacking organisational concreteness, the musical politics was explicitly an argument about their lack of musical expertise. As a result, it brought into the political field a form of engagement that was based on the cultural resources of critics and, more generally, on the *cultural logic* of popular music criticism. This strategy advocated the primacy of aesthetic criteria over purely political ones. More specifically, it was an argument about the political value of *good* music, an idea that was the implicit premise of the politics of music discussed so far.

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<sup>40</sup> The monthlies always devoted some pages to adverts, and *Gong* used to defend this choice vis-à-vis some readers accusing the magazine of 'selling out'. Adverts that appeared in the monthlies included record companies' pages on new releases, Hi-Fi equipment, and a variety of products aimed at young people (e.g. anti-spot creams, discounts on travel and so on).

### 6.3.2 *Musical politics*

Although music was defined by both *Muzak* and *Gong* as a key means of political struggle, they argued that only some kinds of music could satisfy such purposes. The magazines' politics of music was indeed based on very clear aesthetic hierarchies, and defining such hierarchies was the task through which critics thought they could contribute to the movement. In contrast, they saw counter-cultural and political groups as unqualified to deal with aesthetic issues. In other words, such groups were seen as badly equipped to theorise a new musical culture for a new society. The editorial board of *Gong* argued for the political importance of aesthetic hierarchies during a debate with other political forces, organised by the magazine itself and published in its pages in 1976. The magazine argued that alternative musical events had to be based on clear forms of 'cultural discrimination'.

All [political] organisations have been involved – who more who less – with the organisation of concerts, and usually with questionable artists to say the least, like Soft Machine, Van Der Graaf Generator, Baker Gurwitz Army [sic]. Artists who are questionable both from a cultural and political point of view. Have such organisations considered making any clear cultural discrimination in future? Not discriminations based on the political affiliation or the revolutionary claims of musicians, but on what musicians are able to accomplish on stage, from a cultural point of view.<sup>41</sup>

More generally, both *Gong* and *Muzak* accused new-left groups and the Communist Party of pursuing a purely instrumental cultural politics, as they used music as a means of propaganda in order to attract young people (regardless of music's aesthetic qualities). This was, for example, the way *Gong* assessed the musical events

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<sup>41</sup> Massimo Villa, 'Dibattito sui circuiti musicali: in cammino per cambiare', *Gong*, n. 7/8, year 3<sup>rd</sup>, August-September 1976, pp. 11-13.



organised by the *Circoli Ottobre* (October Circles) – i.e. recreational spaces managed by the Communist Party – and by political groups like the *Partito Radicale* (Radical Party).

The interventions of political groups are a mere activity of propaganda based on an old logic of exploitation, and on a wrong and disqualifying interpretation of the Marxist concept of superstructure.<sup>42</sup>

*Muzak* expressed a similar evaluation of the *Feste dell'Unità* organised by the PCI – a popular event that for *Muzak's* critics emblematised the cultural and organisational power of the party over the musical field.

The PCI has an enormous network. There have been thousands of festivals [organised by the party] in this year alone, in any Italian city and town [...] with a degree of participation which is quantitatively incalculable. The party has huge responsibilities toward an audience increasingly hungry for cultural resources, towards musicians (some of whom are managed exclusively by the party) and towards the political situation, now that music has become a means of struggle or, at least, a means of emancipation. However [...] the cultural line of the festival is a big melting-pot, with some interesting things emerging from an incoherent line. [...] This year we have seen everything and more, from Locomotive Kerutzberg [sic] to Henry Cow, from Archie Shepp to Don Cherry, *but also Raffaella Carrà and Gianni Morandi, along with the usual Dalla and Venditti.*<sup>43</sup> [my emphasis]

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<sup>42</sup> Peppo Delconte, Roberto Masotti, 'Inchiesta Gong. I nuovi circuiti alternativi musicali. La lunga marcia', *Gong*, n. 10, year 2<sup>nd</sup>, October 1975, pp. 9-12.

<sup>43</sup> Gino Castaldo, 'Feste: Evviva l'Unità... nella diversità', *Muzak*, n. 7 (new series), November 1975, pp. 10-12.

The problem underlined by this position-taking is a cultural line that *includes too much*: from the icons of Italian light music (Raffaella Carrà, Gianni Morandi) and politicised singer-songwriters playing frequently at such events (Venditti, Dalla) to acts belonging to the worlds of British progressive rock (Henry Cow) and free-jazz (Archie Shepp, Don Cherry). For the monthlies such *weak* aesthetic boundaries undermined the cultural politics pursued by political actors. In contrast, the monthlies argued that politically relevant music was not music with overtly political contents, but music that was challenging from an aesthetic point of view. According to this position, 'creative' music was able to reshape the sensibility and feelings of people, and as such it could contribute to the broader political project of a different society. This is why both *Muzak* and *Gong* conceived of jazz (particularly free and avant-garde jazz) as the genre that could really contribute to a similar project. In contrast, they saw rock music as increasingly old and unable to further aesthetic progress (see Chapter 7). *Gong* was the magazine expressing this view in the most coherent way, especially through the articles of Franco Bolelli, a music critic who joined the magazine at a later stage, but who became one of its main ideologues during 1976 and 1977. According to Bolelli:

[Political groups] fail to address the kernel of the relation between music and politics. That is, what is the meaning of an aesthetic research *here* (within a Western society whose superstructure has become a determining factor) and *today* (in light of the new political awareness of the masses)?<sup>44</sup>

The answer to this question was found in the music of the 'black avant-garde', that is

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<sup>44</sup> Franco Bolelli, 'Circuiti alternativi: qualche riflessione teorica', *Gong*, n. 9, year 2<sup>nd</sup>, September 1975, pp. 44-45.

African American musicians such as Antony Braxton, Cecil Taylor and the Art Ensemble of Chicago.

The collective and equitable way in which these musicians work [...] is alien to any cliché. While working on a common [aesthetic] objective, they are able to expand their creativity. As such [...] they represent the most accomplished way of interpreting, living and translating the fundamental tensions of reality as a whole.<sup>45</sup>

According to this argument, such creatively challenging music was both the product of ‘real’ political tensions, and an aesthetic force capable of changing people's consciousness. As a result, it was conceived of as both aesthetically and politically challenging:

Of course it is not possible to change reality as a whole through music, but if music starts changing itself, it can contribute to new and more fertile levels of consciousness.<sup>46</sup>

The idea that avant-garde jazz could contribute to a broader political project was supported by *Muzak* as well. Moreover, such a view was reinforced by the success of jazz festivals between 1973 and 1977 in Italy (Prato 2010). In this respect, both the monthlies argued that jazz was becoming a ‘mass’ phenomenon, and they took the success of jazz festivals as further proof of a changing youth culture and Italian society.

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

The new interest [of the youth] in jazz music is not a passive rediscovery of its ‘artistic quality’. [...] Jazz is being rediscovered because it demands a more intelligent form of participation. As with everything that demands intellectual effort (rather than just the guts), it develops understanding of the world and hence real communication.<sup>47</sup>

The reference to the importance of ‘intellectual effort’ reveals a peculiar disposition (Bourdieu 1984, 1993) towards music and popular culture. In this respect, while the monthlies saw music's aesthetic power as intrinsically political, only music with recognisable *highbrow* features (e.g. originality and formal innovation) was seen in such a light. By corollary, as I shall discuss in Chapter 7, music critics had a peculiar relationship with music's bodily pleasures that was highly mediated by highbrow categories and, more generally, by an intellectual view of popular culture.

So far I have explored two strategies of engagement developed by the alternative music press. On the one hand, the monthlies developed a *politics of music* aiming at the constitution of an alternative network of musical events, which as such could exclude the mediation of (some) market forces and promote social and political awareness. On the other hand, such a strategy was based on a distinctive *musical politics*, that is, critics argued that creative music was able to shape the consciousness and culture (in the anthropological sense) of the audience, and thus could contribute to a broader project of sociopolitical change. As I will discuss in Chapter 8, this proposal raised accusations of elitism among readers, with some of them arguing that the politics of the monthlies was excluding a large section of youth culture.<sup>48</sup>

As I argue in the next section, while not ignoring the politicisation of youth culture

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<sup>47</sup> Giaime Pintor, ‘E' morto il pop, viva il jazz’, 15-17, *Muzak*, n. 6 (new series), October 1975, pp. 15-17.

<sup>48</sup> It is worth remembering that the monthlies had a significantly smaller audience than *Ciao 2001*. See Chapter 5.

and the changes occurring in Italian society, *Ciao 2001* defined a very different relationship with political engagement – one shaped by its relative economic power and heteronomous orientation (Bourdieu 1993, 1996).

### 6.3.3 *Music and politics*

*Ciao 2001* developed a strategy of engagement based on two pillars. First, the magazine was committed to an idea of ‘objective’ journalism, whose ideological independence was based on economic autonomy (see Chapter 5). Second, as Saverio Rotondi pointed out on several occasions, the magazine pursued a ‘pluralistic’ agenda embracing a variety of attitudes toward music while excluding only ‘grim commercialism’ and ‘artistic inauthenticity’, as such values were in contradiction with the logic of the field.

I do not think that music has a [political] colour. It has many colours indeed, and we should not ban any of them, except when grim commercialism or artistic inauthenticity are an issue. I firmly believe in pluralism in this respect.<sup>49</sup>

From this standpoint, Rotondi and other critics of *Ciao 2001* conceived of the relationship between the weekly and the political counter-culture as a non-exclusive one. To be sure, the magazine used to review the initiatives willing to link music and politics in a positive fashion. More generally, it saw the rise of new social movements, and the growing institutional power of the left, as welcome changes in Italian society and as changes partly engendered by the youth.

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<sup>49</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Maurizio Iliono (Sezze), ‘Ventunenne comunista’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 24, 19 June 1977, pp. 5-6.

All the civil and democratic achievements of the last few years, as well as the recent mobilisations and struggles, have been engendered by the youth. [...] I cannot say if the political earthquake of the regional elections of June 15 is due solely to the youth. But I am sure that – at the very least – they have conditioned other sectors of society, thus turning the key problems of our country into a public issue.<sup>50</sup>

However, the magazine also argued that music should not *necessarily* be linked to politics, and that the musical field should not be solely managed by political and counter-cultural groups.

We cannot close our eyes and hope for an impossible return to the years before 1967-68, which were not affected by the current problems and struggles. *What we have to ask is that music is not killed by politics. There must be viable alternatives for those wishing to listen to music but who do not want to participate in political events [...] if there must be freedom of participation in political events [...] there must also be the freedom to enjoy the music that one likes.*<sup>51</sup> [my emphasis]

This position is also revealed by the coverage of events like the festival of *Parco Lambro*, which was distinctively different from that provided by the monthlies (see Section 6.3.1). On the one hand, *Ciao 2001* positively reviewed *Parco Lambro* in 1974, 1975 and 1976. On the other hand, the magazine's accounts did not position *Ciao 2001* within the movement. The articles on *Parco Lambro* adopted an *objectivising* perspective. In other words, the critic speaking in such articles is an observer who occasionally expresses sympathy for the ideological underpinnings of

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<sup>50</sup> Adriano Ruocco, '1975-76 Scuolaortobiezionedroga', *Ciao 2001*, n. 1, 11 January 1976, pp. 13-14.

<sup>51</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Claudio Scarpa (Rome), 'Un delitto non parlarne', *Ciao 2001*, n. 8, 29 February 1976, pp. 5-6.

the event, but who avoids making any proposal of cultural politics for the movement and on behalf of *Ciao 2001*. In this respect, in 1974 *Parco Lambro* was simply reviewed as a popular event worthy of journalistic attention.

[*Parco Lambro* is] an event that has received the support of democratic, political and cultural associations, and which has been attended by tens of thousands of people.

This edition of the festival has been a big success.<sup>52</sup>

The edition of 1976, which was affected by disturbances and a high degree of conflict between different groups of the movement, was framed both as a popular event and as a positive landmark for the movement. Nevertheless, the position of the magazine – albeit sympathetic – remained external to it.

This year, the youth proletariat festival [...] has offered a lot more than music and the slogans of the various organising groups; it has been the ground of struggles as well as encounters. It has made concrete both the expectations and the uncertainties of a movement, which involves hundreds of thousands of people. *We will need to address it again in order to provide a cold-minded evaluation.*<sup>53</sup> [my emphasis]

*Ciao 2001* never mirrored *Muzak* and *Gong*'s ambition to set a cultural politics for the movement. It simply addressed such events as part of youth culture, which the magazine aimed to represent in its entirety. Moreover, *Ciao 2001* was in disagreement with some proposals from the monthlies, like the exclusion of private organisers from the musical field. A case in point, in this respect, is the coverage of the

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<sup>52</sup> Daniele Caroli, 'Re Nudo. Festa del proletariato giovanile', *Ciao 2001*, n. 29, 21 July 1974, pp. 37-39.

<sup>53</sup> Daniele Caroli, 'Quattro giorni al Parco Lambro. Musica, violenza, dibattiti, gente', *Ciao 2001*, n. 30, 1 August 1976, pp. 42-44.

*Santamonica Festival*. For *Muzak*, the festival became an occasion to attack private organisers (as shown by Section 6.3.1). By contrast, *Ciao 2001* considered effective market structures and professional organisers as preconditions for a thriving music culture – one that could be in line with the professional standards of Anglo-American pop-rock. From this standpoint, excessive politicisation was seen as a risk both for live concerts and for Italian pop-rock at large.

Live concerts are at risk [...]. This is the end of a cycle for rock music in Italy, one which led bands like Banco and PFM [Italian rock bands] to success. A [new] cycle of political ‘trials’ for such bands has just started [...]. [However] there are further problems: *lack of spaces and structures which may guarantee the work [of musicians]*. *Italians have not learnt anything from the experience of Anglo-Saxon countries*. What we have is provincialism, laziness and insufficient musical preparation, *along with outdated labels and business models*. [...] There are some people ready to exert violence in order to sustain the idea of ‘free music’. It is a beautiful ideal, which is also in line with some of the messages conveyed by youth music. *However, it is incompatible with the organisation of concerts as it exists in Italy and abroad (with the difference that only here there are people protesting)*.<sup>54</sup> [my emphasis]

This position by no means supported the exclusion of professional organisers from the musical field. While both the alternative music press and *Ciao 2001* condemned the violence fuelled by the free music movement, *Ciao 2001* was for the enforcement of professional structures, and not for the monopoly of political and counter-cultural forces over musical practices. In other words, for *Ciao 2001* there could be both music and politics, and the latter did not necessarily have to mediate (or define) the

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<sup>54</sup> Anonymous, ‘Da Santamonica. La stangata’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 31, 4 August 1974, pp. 15-17.



former.

#### 6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the ways in which Italian music critics interpreted the rise of political activism in the musical sector and in other fields of Italian society.

Further, it has explored how critics implemented their own strategies of political engagement, and more specifically how magazines occupying different positions devised markedly different forms of engagement. I have shown that the organisation with the strongest economic position within the field (*Ciao 2001*) did not prioritise the relation between music and politics, but advocated a pluralistic approach to music production and consumption. Moreover, it advocated for the enforcement (rather than exclusion) of existing market institutions in the musical field. On the contrary, magazines endowed mostly with cultural capital, such as *Muzak* and *Gong*, supported both the exclusion of (some) market actors, and claimed a stronger homology (Bourdieu 1984, 1996)<sup>55</sup> with emerging political avant-gardes. Moreover, they defined popular music criticism as a quintessentially political practice with radical objectives of social change. However, both *Muzak* and *Gong* joined the political movement mobilising their own cultural expertise as a *political resource*. In other words, their engagement was based on the primacy of music and the aesthetic, rather than on the demands of political propaganda. For this avant-garde of the music press, then, only good and challenging music could contribute to a broader project of social change. More generally, the chapter has argued that the popular music press redefined political engagement according to the field's doxa, and thus according to its specific cultural logic. Conversely, the broader space of possibles enhanced by Italy's

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<sup>55</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion of homology vis-à-vis Bourdieu's theoretical tool-kit.

political upheaval (as well as by socio-political transformations taking place abroad) significantly shaped critics' categories of perception, the meanings they ascribed to their work and how they justified its social relevance. I will now explore how the different positions implemented by *Ciao 2001*, *Muzak* and *Gong* shaped two specific practices: the evaluation of popular music genres (Chapter 7) and the mediation of readers' discussions and reflections (Chapter 8).

## **Chapter 7**

### **Musical evaluation as a social encounter: Italian critics and the reception of rock, jazz and soul**

The previous two chapters analysed the ways in which critics engaged with cultural and political institutions in order to define a new space of practice. While these chapters focused on the emergence and social construction of popular music criticism (and on the analysis of position-takings), this chapter analyses how critics engaged with different music genres. My discussion aims to expand on existing research on the evaluative strategies of critics (as discussed in Chapter 1) exploring both the influence of institutional differentiation on such strategies, and the meanings emerging from the encounter between Italian critics and different kinds of music. Put otherwise, I will conceptualise the evaluation of music as a *social encounter* between critics occupying a specific national and institutional position, and music genres endowed with autonomous historical trajectories (Lena and Peterson 2008), social connotations and sonic properties (DeNora 2002). In this respect, the chapter questions the opposition between a ‘sociology of music’ that ascribes causal power to institutional arrangements, and a ‘music sociology’ that emphasises the autonomy of music from such constraints (Chapter 2).<sup>1</sup> In what follows, I argue that a revised version of Bourdieu's relational epistemology (as discussed in Chapter 3) is better equipped to account for the properties of both different musics and the actors engaging with them, as it makes it possible to explore how the social biography and institutional role of people shape their relationship with music. Conversely, it makes it possible to recognise the affordances of different musics for the interpretive work

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the similar opposition between sociology of culture and cultural sociology.

of critics (DeNora, 2002).

The chapter's first section analyses the evaluative repertoire of critics; namely the 'high-brow' discourse which they used to assess the originality of music and its autonomy from market constraints. Moreover, this section explores critics' use of the highbrow repertoire (that is, their cultural capital) vis-à-vis music's pleasures. In this respect, it focuses on the encounter between critics' aesthetic disposition and music's emotional powers, arguing that critics interpreted such powers according to a broader cultural hierarchy grounded in their habitus. The second section, focusing on the case of pop-rock, looks at music's social properties, that is, the historical and social meanings encoded in different music genres (Frith 1998). More specifically, it argues that musicians acted as *embodied histories* for critics, that is, as objects of evaluation eliciting discourses, as well as memories about the broader cultural traditions that they were taken to represent. The third section focuses on jazz, and argues that the centrality of musicians within the process of evaluation makes their social identities and bodies an object of evaluation in itself. In this respect, I will argue that musicians' ethnicity became a stake in the struggles among different magazines over the meaning of jazz. The final section further explores this question looking at the case of gender and the way in which critics conceived of the social role of women musicians. Overall, while exploring a range of encounters between critics and the properties of different musics, the chapter highlights institutional differences in the strategies of magazines, hence showing that the field's structure had a significant impact on the ways in which cultural evaluation was carried out.

The chapter is based on a sample of feature articles (296) addressing single musicians, bands and music genres at large. As discussed in Chapter 4, this

purposive sample has been constructed in order to represent a variety of critics working for the three magazines under study, and to cover four musical macro-categories: pop-rock, jazz, soul-disco and folk. The chapter will focus mostly on the first three genres, leaving folk aside for reasons of space. The articles have been analysed through a combination of discourse and thematic analysis: the former was employed to develop inductively the evaluative criteria used by critics as well as the meanings they ascribed to different genres; the latter was used to map recurring criteria of evaluation onto the whole sample. For a more extensive methodological discussion see Chapter 4.

### **7.1 Cultural capital and the politics of pleasure**

As discussed in the previous two chapters, music critics were very concerned with the artistic quality of popular music. In fact, it is on the basis of a distinction between artistically valuable and ‘lower’ cultural forms that they questioned Italian popular culture (Chapter 5). Further, as shown by Chapter 6, they devised strategies of political intervention based on their own cultural expertise and, for the monthlies, on the belief that aesthetically challenging music could contribute to changing people and (by extension) society. It is not surprising, then, to find out that the definition of aesthetic hierarchies was a key function of the evaluations that critics performed through feature articles. As summarised by **table 7.1** (below), *Ciao 2001*, *Muzak* and *Gong* addressed the question of the aesthetic originality of music in the majority of features analysed, both when evaluating a specific piece of music or the entire career of musicians. To a lesser extent, then, they used to discuss the creative autonomy of musicians vis-à-vis the perils posed by the mediation of market structures. In this respect, the mastery of highbrow categories was a key resource for all the magazines

studied notwithstanding their institutional differences, and the highbrow repertoire was mobilised to discuss music genres as different as rock, jazz, soul and folk.

**Table 7.1, Highbrow repertoire \***

	Features analysed	Originality of the musician and/or the musical work	Market constraints
<b>Magazines</b>			
<i>Ciao 2001</i>	186	151 (81,1%)	65 (34,9%)
<i>Muzak</i>	54	49 (92,4%)	25 (47,1%)
<i>Gong</i>	57	54 (94,7%)	34 (59,6%)
<b>Genres</b>			
Pop-Rock	168	145 (86,3%)	73 (43,4%)
Jazz	67	60 (89,5%)	28 (41,7%)
Folk	47	39 (82,9%)	16 (34%)
Soul-Disco	25	23 (92%)	10 (40%)

As a result, the originality of both music and its makers was addressed while assessing very different acts, such as Fairport Convention (an English folk-rock band), the jazz composer Carla Bley and the rock songwriter Patti Smith.

From both a conceptual and technical point of view, [Fairport Convention] are at the cutting-edge of contemporary music. They are still among the best and most active bands within the English scene. [...] Drawing on ancient folk traditions, they make a kind of rock music that expands existing expressive and musical possibilities.<sup>2</sup>

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\* The total number of features analysed is 296. As some of them (11) address more than one genre, they have been coded with more than one genre category. This is why the sum of references to genres (307) is higher than the number of articles.

<sup>2</sup> Marco Ferranti, 'Celebrazioni e speranze per il folk inglese', *Ciao 2001*, n. 26, 4 July 1976, pp. 51-52.

Carla Bley is an extraordinary musical organiser in the broadest sense of the term.

While composing, arranging and conducting, she draws on an apparently inexhaustible reserve of ideas. She is involved in a broad diversity of experiments and always stamps her personality on them.<sup>3</sup>

Patti Smith is a product of the latest generation of American pop musicians [...] her art, today, is no longer urgent and original poetry (as one of the Founding Fathers). It can only be an intellectual game. This is the most disconcerting aspect of her music. *Horses* [Smith's first album] sounds like a record of the 1960s, it reminds us of the years before Woodstock, the years of the beat [...] such an exact reconstruction sounds suspect.<sup>4</sup>

As exemplified by the argument about Patti Smith's lack of originality, the concept of innovation worked as a standard of evaluation both in positive and negative features. Its importance emerges also when critics consider the autonomy of musicians from the imperatives of the music industry; the latter being identified with the maximisation of profit and, therefore, with the pursuit of purely economic capital. From this perspective, an entire musical trend, like disco music, could be considered as lacking the prerequisite of artistic autonomy.

The technical and industrial nature of disco-music [sic] inevitably empties its main protagonists of any content. What do Roberta Kelly and Donna Summer could ever tell us? They are shiny puppets in the hands of their producer, Giorgio Moroder. But do not think that Moroder himself could say anything interesting or surprising. This kind of music industry [i.e. disco music] remains strongly attached to the concept 'I do

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<sup>3</sup> Gino Castaldo, 'Carla Bley e la jazz Composer's Orchestra', *Muzak*, n. 12, October 1974, pp. 47-50.

<sup>4</sup> Riccardo Bertoncelli, 'Patty in Excelsis', *Gong*, n. 7-8, July-August 1976, pp. 54-56.

what people like to sell more and more', no matter how inventive it could appear.<sup>5</sup>

These examples reveal both the importance of critics' highbrow disposition and the extent to which they 'made distinctions' within popular culture, for example between valuable and debased acts, but also between genres worthy of attention and genres seen as entirely commodified. In this respect, these findings about the Italian context resonate with other studies showing that a similar evaluative repertoire was used to legitimise popular music genres like rock (van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010, Lindberg et al. 2005) and jazz (Lopes 2002) throughout the twentieth century. However, an analysis focusing solely on critics' highbrow repertoire presents limitations as well. On the one hand, it cannot account for institutional differences among critics occupying different positions within the field. On the other hand, it is problematic if one wants to analyse the way critics made sense of music's *emotional*, rather than artistic, qualities. In this respect, scholars studying music criticism either from cultural studies (Lindberg et al. 2005) or sociology of culture (van Venrooij and Schmutz 2010) perspectives have conceptualised highbrow criteria as opposed to 'popular' values. Drawing mostly on Bourdieu (1984), the latter have been associated with an aesthetic of the senses and the body, that is, with a focus on the pleasures, rather than artistic and historical significance, of popular culture.<sup>6</sup> Keeping this distinction in place, the aforementioned studies, as discussed in Chapter 1, argue that popular music criticism is based on an 'intermediary' aesthetic, as it mobilises both highbrow and popular criteria. Although Italian critics used to discuss the pleasures associated

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<sup>5</sup> Marco Ferranti, 'Ah, questa disco-music', *Ciao 2001*, n. 16, 24 April 1977, pp. 66-67.

<sup>6</sup> According to Bourdieu (1984) a popular disposition prioritises immediate satisfaction and, more generally, the functional dimension of consumption. As discussed in Chapter 1, the opposition between high and popular criteria remains central in the sociology of criticism.



with music very frequently,<sup>7</sup> it would be misleading to conclude that their evaluations ‘merged’ highbrow and popular criteria. In this respect, the following analysis of how critics discussed music pleasure shows that they associated different kinds of pleasure with different genres and performers. Indeed, critics evaluated pleasure in light of a broader cultural taxonomy, so that the meaning of music's emotional force depended on the artistic value they assigned to pieces of musical work, authors and genres. I argue, then, that it is more useful to conceptualise critics' relationship with musical pleasure as a *politics of pleasure*, rather than as a straightforward acceptance of popular values. In other words, rather than praising music's sensuous properties in general, critics used to qualify and evaluate pleasure vis-à-vis music's highbrow qualities.

This selective and evaluative approach towards music's pleasure emerges with particular clarity in articles about ‘hard rock’ acts. This genre-label was used to describe music characterised by guitar-based riffs, loud and aggressive distortions and other sonic features perceived as ‘rough’. More specifically, critics identified hard rock with American and English acts like Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, Uriah Heep, Alice Cooper and Kiss. Sometimes the label was used in relation to English acts that were liked by ‘teenyboppers’,<sup>8</sup> such as Gary Glitter, Sweet and Bay City Rollers. For example, the following article describes the music of David Bowie and Gary Glitter as similarly characterised by ‘easy and rhythmic [sounds], which are very close to the emotional simplicity of rock 'n' roll.’ However, the emotional force associated with these sonic structures was evaluated in relation to the artistic and historical significance of the musicians. As a result, a sharp distinction could

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<sup>7</sup> Music's emotional force is addressed by 121 articles out of 296.

<sup>8</sup> Both critics and readers used to associate ‘teenybopper’ music with the (poor) taste of the youngest music fans. As a result, the label was charged with a social distinction that emerges also in discussions between critics and readers. For reasons of space, I will leave this question outside the discussion.

be made between the different feelings elicited by the music of Bowie and Glitter respectively.

Bowie is the true inheritor of a genuinely rock tradition with a specific cultural background – a music that was born with the Rolling Stones and has further evolved with Bob Dylan and Velvet Underground [...] Glitter and the likes, on the contrary, have nothing behind their shoulders. [...] Their heavy and unoriginal music is *a purely epidermic fact; one which is consciously manufactured to please the youngest people*. They are consumeristic puppets lacking any real and vital expressive validity.<sup>9</sup> [my emphasis]

A similar assessment of hard rock was shared by *Ciao 2001*, *Muzak* and *Gong*. In the following example, *Muzak*'s director Giaime Pintor uses hard rock to make a similar distinction between 1960s rock-blues acts, such as Yardbirds and Jeff Beck, and 1970s ones such as Grand Funk Railroad. As with the former example, musical pleasure is evaluated according to the historical and aesthetic significance of the bands producing it.

The first wave of hard rock bands had a subversive quality; it was a musical evolution in comparison to *simpler kinds of music providing just empty pleasures* [vibrazioni]. [...] [However] *[t]he relief inducted by either violent stimulation or sleeping pills is not what we should ask from the arts*. Today hard rock is the whore of music; *it gives us the frustrating emotion of a moment*. This is humiliating for us, as well as for music. What kind of contribution does hard music provide? The masturbation of the ear, the death of critical consciousness and the neglect of everyday struggle [lotta].<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Manuel Insolera, 'Gary Glitter. Motorcycle rock', *Ciao 2001*, n. 9, 3 March 1974, pp. 52-54.

<sup>10</sup> Giaime Pintor, 'Hard rock: dall'evasione all'evasione', *Muzak*, n. 10-11, August-September, 1974,

[my emphasis]

More generally, different genres and acts could be seen as providing very different kinds of pleasure, as argued in the following example comparing the ‘delicate emotions’ provided by Hatfield And The North (an English progressive rock act) with the commodified ‘amphetaminic violence’ provided by Black Sabbath.

[Hatfield and the North] are fascinatingly different from the conformism of current stylistic canons, such as easy blues revivals or *the destructive and hyper-amplified rage of hard rock apostles* [...] [Hatfield and the North] provides *fragile and delicate emotions, not hyper violence and alcoholic flashes*; that is, the means through which the Black Sabbath, in England, are collecting millions of pounds. The higher the watts, the more the money...<sup>11</sup> [my emphasis]

Emotional and bodily pleasures, then, were not framed as negative properties per se. Critics could identify also types of music whose emotional qualities were supported by a sufficient degree of artistic research. In this respect, the following examples discussing 1960s rock-blues bands (Seeds and Love) frame pleasure as something that disrupts everyday experience, rather than as something superficial or violent.

The Seeds are among the few American bands (along with The Mothers of Invention and the Doors) who were able to follow the uncertain rock-blues path with rigour and creativity. [...] Their sound, increasingly essential and ‘replicable’ [*“ripetibile”*], *could strip away the banality of family afternoons; it freed adrenaline in order to*

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pp. 6-9.

<sup>11</sup> Marco Fumagalli, ‘L’ultimo racconto di Canterbury: Hatfield and the North’, *Gong*, n. 1, January 1974, pp. 31-35.

*create a new order of mind and body.*<sup>12</sup> [my emphasis]

Let's put in a good word for the hard sound (in spite of the group's name). Love were one of the few bands who understand the rock lesson with an open mind. *They used the guitar to move, explore and let explode the doors of normality. [...] They had a spectacular energy* and the guitar of Arthur Lee could burn all his competitors (except the uncatchable Jimi Hendrix).<sup>13</sup> [my emphasis]

The examples discussed so far evaluate musical pleasure in a contextual and historical way. In this respect, critics did not support a general 'aesthetics of the senses'. Quite the reverse: they enacted a subtle politics of pleasure; one which was shaped both by highbrow values and knowledge of the musical past. As a result, critics' evaluations result from the encounter between their aesthetic disposition (one focusing on music's artistic and historical significance) and music's sonic properties (e.g. 'hard' guitar riffs, high volumes and so on). The next section will further explore the role played by historical knowledge in the evaluations of Italian critics, focusing on the encounter between their social biography and the cultural history *embodied* by pop-rock musicians. The section will also start addressing the influence of the field's structure on critics' evaluations.

## **7.2 Pop-rock and the politics of history**

Other scholars (Frith 1983, Fornas 1995) have argued that pop-rock may work as a relatively flexible cultural category encompassing a variety of sub-genres, such as hard rock, progressive rock, folk-rock, rock 'n' roll, punk and so on. The concepts

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<sup>12</sup> Riccardo Bertoncelli, 'Seeds', *Gong*, n. 4, April 1976, pp. 50-51.

<sup>13</sup> Riccardo Bertoncelli, 'Love', *Gong*, n. 12, December 1975, p. 18.

of pop and rock had a similar function for Italian music critics. More specifically, they were used as synonyms to indicate a range of American, British and Italian acts representing a different culture than Italian light music (as discussed in Chapter 5). However, between 1973 and 1977 the discourses of Italian critics about pop-rock were mostly discourses about its *crisis*, as critics used to compare contemporary acts and trends to a canon of 1960s ‘founding fathers’<sup>14</sup> like the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, Pink Floyd and so on. This crisis was conceived of in social as well as aesthetic terms. According to Italian critics, American rock culture had failed to fully develop the alternative culture which it seemed to represent in the late 1960s. As I show below, while the pop-rock crisis was a shared concern for music critics, the magazines developed different strategies to cope with it – strategies which reveal the influence of the field over the encounter between Italian critics and Anglo-American rock music.

The crisis of 1960s rock culture was addressed while reviewing new albums of the founding fathers as well as new musicians. This kind of discourse emerges, for example, while evaluating, respectively, the trajectories of Jefferson Airplane and Grateful Dead.

It is difficult to believe that today someone could fall in love with the Californian sound. Without the society that nourished it, the legendary style is nowadays a pale ghost. It is just a ‘genre’ among others [...] a reassuring musical signature. This would have been unthinkable during the days of White Rabbit [Jefferson Airplane's song] and Grace Slick's scandalous tongue.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Riccardo Bertoncelli, ‘Patty in Excelsis’, *Gong*, n. 7-8, July-August 1976, pp. 54-56.

<sup>15</sup> Riccardo Bertoncelli, ‘California 10 anni dopo: ma l'amore mio no..’, *Gong*, n. 7-8, July-August, 1976, pp. 7-9.

The 'cosmic dream' of the old, glorious and beloved Grateful Dead has become a mere aesthetic fact [...] the spirit has gone and will never come back. The band has 'grown up'. They have money, their own label, and can have everything they want. And nowadays they just want to have some fun.<sup>16</sup>

For Italian music critics these bands, as well as musicians like the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan, spoke of an entire (albeit recent) cultural past. Moreover, in some instances they could evaluate the historical and biographical trajectory of musicians in light of their own generational trajectory. Particularly on the pages of *Muzak* and *Gong*, the decline of rock was connected with memories of the personal as well as collective discovery of 1960s rock. Being for the most part teenagers when British beat and American rock music arrived in Italy, critics' disposition (Bourdieu 1984) toward popular music had been shaped by such a moment of musical 'education'. The reception of 1960s pop-rock, as a result, had shaped their musical habitus (Rimmer 2012) – one which was challenged by the ageing of rock culture throughout the 1970s.

I cannot explain it. The youngest generations cannot understand John Mayall's music [...] a tired music which seems to be the product of the umpteenth 1974 revival. How could they see that this tired forty-something man is the same exceptional creator of ten years ago, the number one of English blues, a fond memory filled with nostalgia.<sup>17</sup>

As shown by the former examples, these musicians embodied a broader generational history for music critics. The cultural evaluations arising from the

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<sup>16</sup> Manuel Insolera, 'Grateful Dead. Album nuovo, storia vecchia', *Ciao* 2001, n. 32, 11 August 1974, pp. 66-67.

<sup>17</sup> Riccardo Bertinelli, 'John Mayall, i Blues Breakers, l'English Blues', *Gong*, n. 2, February 1975, pp. 13-16.

encounter between *these* musicians and *these* critics can thus be conceptualised as the meeting of two histories (Bourdieu 1993, 1996). This process becomes even more evident when critics recall key moments of discovery, such as the arrival of the Beatles in Italy and the discovery of Frank Zappa's music and image.

For us, in an Italy where the football match was the best you could get as mass culture, the arrival of the Beatles was like a thunderbolt. We were just teenagers [*ragazzotti*] torn between the oratory, sport, school and repressed sexual desires. More than an explosion, the Beatles were like awakening after a very long sleep.<sup>18</sup>

An odd gentleman seated on a toilet; with a funny moustache and a laughable name [...] We were in the middle of the 1968, and the seated-on-a-toilet Zappa gave us the subtle emotion of the baby saying 'poo' to the priest-uncle. That vulgarity became a positive value; a way to construct and affirm an identity denied by a patriarchal and liberal-repressive family.<sup>19</sup>

However, while the crisis of this culture was a shared concern of the critics writing for *Ciao 2001*, *Muzak* and *Gong*, the magazines developed different institutional solutions to the issue. More specifically, they made different choices of coverage and justified them through different ideological arguments. On the one hand (as anticipated in Chapter 6), *Muzak* and *Gong* interpreted the success of Italian jazz festivals as the rise of a new youth culture. They argued, thus, that jazz could have a social and political function for young people that rock had completely lost.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Paolo M. Ricci, 'Beatles', *Muzak*, n. 12, October 1974, pp. 26.

<sup>19</sup> Giaime Pintor, 'Miti & Riti: C'è un signore seduto sul cesso coi baffi', *Muzak*, n. 4 (new series), July 1975, pp. 39-40.

<sup>20</sup> Gino, Castaldo, 'Roll over Beethoven', *Muzak*, n. 10 (new series), February 1976, 25-29; Franco Bolelli, 'Avanguardia: il movimento dei navigatori solitari. Attraverso lo specchio', *Gong*, n. 1, January 1977, pp. 66-68. *Muzak* framed in a similar fashion the Italian folk revival and its success

From this standpoint, they conceived of jazz, and particularly African American free jazz, as a music embodying the social and political struggle of black people within the US context (I shall develop this point in Section 7.3). On the other hand, *Ciao 2001* did not focus solely on jazz, neither did it affirm that jazz had any special value in comparison to other musical trends emerging from the market. In this respect, the magazine addressed a broader variety of new genres and acts, which were either dismissed or rarely addressed by the monthlies (e.g. disco music, punk, country-rock). This strategy is well exemplified by the way in which the magazine covered soul and disco music,<sup>21</sup> the latter being a musical trend that gained growing success in the Italian charts since the 1975 (Sfardini 2001, Facchinotti 2001). The aim of the magazine was to extensively cover the new trend in order to provide readers with information about its socio-cultural background and the names associated with it.

[Disco music] is not simply about another band to be easily glorified as the new Beatles. Disco music [...] is a wider and more interesting phenomenon. According to the most qualified observers, it is taking the place of rock. With a range of feature articles to be published in the coming weeks, we will try to understand discos' revival and their relation with the living conditions of ethnic and artistic minorities. We will also discover who are the new protagonists, artists and disk-jockeys.<sup>22</sup>

To be sure, critics writing for *Ciao 2001* could be either positive or negative about disco acts, with negative evaluations pointing to the lack of creative autonomy of

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among young people. On the contrary, *Gong* was dismissive of Italian folk-rock bands, and more interested in musicians working between jazz and avant-garde music.

<sup>21</sup> Critics saw disco as a trend deriving from soul music and rhythm 'n' blues. As a result, soul and disco were frequently used as synonyms.

<sup>22</sup> Enzo Caffarelli, 'Disco-Boom: le discoteche sono i nuovi Beatles', *Ciao 2001*, n. 27, 13 July 1975, pp. 31-33.



performers as well as the repetitive and uninspired nature of the music itself. The crucial point was *to not ignore* a trend that was gaining market relevance. As a result, the magazine could host a number of different views about the new trend, and explicitly supported the possibility (and legitimacy) of conflicting stances about it.

The most striking event of 1976 is the rise of discos, with their stereotypical rhythms, the computerised orchestras and voices, and other consumerist gimmicks. The phenomenon can be either alarming, intriguing or exciting, depending on the point of view.<sup>23</sup>

This strategy resulted in an extensive coverage of soul and disco. In contrast, as shown by **table 7.2**,<sup>24</sup> the monthlies almost ignored it, publishing only few features that dismissed the genre for its low cultural status, albeit singling out few exceptions (e.g. Stevie Wonder for *Gong*, Labelle for *Muzak*).

From a theoretical point of view, *Ciao 2001* employed the cultural capital of its critics in a very different way than the monthlies. While the latter focused on genres, which, in their view, were gaining socio-political significance for Italian youth culture, *Ciao 2001* developed a more inclusive coverage and mobilised its cultural expertise to stay *closer* to the market and to remain *open* toward a musical landscape characterised by the emergence of new trend and the decline of 1960s rock.

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<sup>23</sup> Enzo Caffarelli, '1976', *Ciao 2001*, n. 3, 23 January 1977, pp. 31-36.

<sup>24</sup> The table contrasts the amount of features published by the monthlies with a purposive sample of those published by *Ciao 2001*. Arrows indicate that the list is simply a sample of a broader coverage.

**Table 7.2 - Coverage of soul and disco music  
(1975-1977)**

Ciao 2001	Muzak	Gong
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px auto; width: fit-content;"> <p>*Disco-boom (3) Gloria Gaynor (2) Diana Ross (2) *Disco music Labelle James Brown Minnie Riperton Betty Davis Temptations Marvin Gaye Undisputed Truth Ray Charles Roberta Kelly</p> </div>	<p>*The Sunset of Soul Labelle</p>	<p>Stevie Wonder</p>

\* Features on disco as a trend.

In this respect, as discussed also in Chapter 5, *Ciao 2001* is a case that problematises Bourdieu's opposition (1993, 1996) between cultural producers oriented towards maximisation of profits (heteronomous actors) and those pursuing maximisation of symbolic capital (autonomous actors). To be sure, cultural expertise remained crucial for *Ciao 2001*. The point, in fact, was not to celebrate any new musical trend, but to *evaluate* them retaining symbolic autonomy. This strategy is well summarised by the following justification provided by the magazine's director for the coverage of disco. The argument was made to address some readers who accused the magazine of having 'betrayed' rock.

You say we are the first ones among the betrayers of rock. Well, let's be clear: we make a magazine, and we do that to inform the readers, not to tell them every week the history of rock from ten years ago. If music changes, and if there is nothing new to say about Yes [progressive British band], it is not our fault. As professionals, we are

the observers – not the makers – of the current situation. Your allegations are meaningless, as we are just journalists.<sup>25</sup>

According to Saverio Rotondi, thus, paying attention to the market and critical distance were not necessarily principles that were in contradiction to each other. Indeed, *Ciao 2001* was constructed as a media whose objective was precisely to address *critically* new market trends.

Disco-music is not just music, it is a social and economic fact, a market trend. As such, it cannot be ignored, it must be analysed and, possibly, even criticised.<sup>26</sup>

Overall, while the evaluation of contemporary rock acts was shaped by the generational habitus of critics, the field's institutional differentiation informed the strategies that the magazines developed in order to cope with the perceived crisis of rock. More generally, this section has explored the social meanings arising from the encounter between Italian music critics and Anglo-American rock music. I have argued that critics' cultural evaluations were activated by the encounter between their musical habitus and musicians embodying a broader cultural history. The next section will explore the strategy of the monthlies vis-à-vis the crisis of rock more specifically. Moreover, focusing on the coverage of jazz, it will analyse the role played by musicians' social identity and bodies within the process of evaluation.

### **7.3 Jazz and the politics of ethnicity**

Between 1973 and 1977 Italian music magazines covered jazz music in a

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<sup>25</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Gaetano Bottazzi, 'Per la gioia dei quattordicenni', *Ciao 2001*, n. 9, 7 March 1977, pp. 5-6.

<sup>26</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Roby '60, 'La crisi attuale', *Ciao 2001*, n. 16, 24 April 1977, pp. 5-6.

systematic fashion.<sup>27</sup> Despite jazz's constant presence on their pages, however, it assumed a very different meaning vis-à-vis the different cultural projects that the monthlies and *Ciao 2001* were developing. More specifically, musicians who emerged with the 1960s 'free jazz' movement, as well as musicians seen as further developing this tradition, became a key concern for *Muzak* and *Gong*. Although they also covered European and other American acts, African American free music evoked discussions about the political meaning of music and its place within Italian youth cultures. Moreover, the different take on jazz developed by the monthlies and *Ciao 2001* reveals a struggle over the meaning of blackness and its socio-political significance.

While evaluating jazz, critics could discuss the difficulties encountered by African American musicians throughout their careers, and thus the racial inequalities of American society. However, the magazines framed this question in very different ways. For *Muzak* and *Gong*, the value of free jazz was intimately entwined with the value of musicians struggling to develop aesthetically challenging music vis-à-vis an indifferent music industry and a racist society. The black musician, as a result, was seen as a cultural hero making quintessentially political music. In a discussion of the musical career of Don Cherry, for example, free jazz could be framed as a 'revolutionary discourse from both a musical and human point of view':

During the early 1960s, after centuries of slavery and white domination, a new and violent will of struggle emerged among the African American people. Malcom [sic] X made his voice heard loud and clear, and the music of Ornette [Coleman], Don

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<sup>27</sup> Jazz was usually covered by one or two critics for each magazine. The sample of jazz articles has been constructed in order to reflect this division of labour (see Chapter 4) and to cover the magazines' main jazz writers: Dario Salvatori (*Ciao 2001*), Giacomo Pellicciotti (*Muzak* and later *Gong*), Gino Castaldo (*Muzak*) and Franco Bolelli (*Gong*).

[Cherry] [...] Cecil [Taylor] and others was *the natural soundtrack of that moment of socio-political change. It is something natural and instinctive, which often escapes the actual consciousness of musicians.*<sup>28</sup> [my emphasis]

African American jazz was therefore political in a sense that could transcend the consciousness and beliefs of musicians. From this standpoint, social differences among musicians, as well as their different status within the music industry, did not contradict this more fundamental African American condition.

The worldview emerging from [Miles] Davis's music is deeply African American [...] Arguments about his bourgeois origins or his current wealth do not contradict this fact. As argued by Leroi Jones [sic], the introverted and nihilistic qualities of Davis's sound reflect an essential tendency of the African American universe – namely the reaction of black men against racist exploitation. This tendency, which was already present in traditional blues, is subliminal and unconscious in Davis. Nevertheless, it is a fundamental and unavoidable tendency.<sup>29</sup>

This perspective connecting musical forms with the (political) unconscious of black people was based on a specific conception of the African American identity, which resembles the structure of folk ideology (Middleton 1990, Roy 2002). Music was thus taken to represent, without any mediation, a 'culture' in the anthropological sense (Williams 1976), that is the values and will of a whole social group. Moreover, black jazz was framed as the culture of a radically different other (Roy 2002). However, such reading was still supported by critics' highbrow disposition. As pointed out in Chapter 6, the monthlies used to ascribe political

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<sup>28</sup> Giacomo Pellicciotti, 'Don Cherry. Organic Music Theatre', *Muzak*, n. 3, December 1973, pp. 25-27.

<sup>29</sup> Gino Castaldo, 'Il Davis del jazz', *Muzak*, n. 11 (new series), March 1976, pp. 37-38.

value only to aesthetically valuable music, rather than to music with explicitly political contents (e.g. political lyrics). Indeed, the logic of what I called *musical politics* largely informed their approach to jazz music. In line with the examples discussed above, the following article about the most ‘interesting’ jazz musicians in New York establishes a connection between creativity and musicians' social marginality. In other words, it establishes a structural homology (Bourdieu 1984) between the radical aesthetic of some musicians (e.g. Oliver Lake, the jazz group Air) and a difficult social condition.

These artists, who usually come to New York in their thirties [...] are shaped by the socio-economic background of the Midwest, where racism and struggles between blacks and whites are still violent. They proudly draw on the Great Black Music, that is a music without stylistic or historical limitations which encompasses the African American tradition in its entirety (from ragtime to free jazz). However, their attachment to the tradition does not lead to an empty revival. [...] Indeed, the most interesting music that you can hear today in the US is a lucid revision of the musical experience of African Americans. It is a synthesis of various stylistic elements, but reworked through a new and contemporary sensibility.<sup>30</sup>

By and large, these readings implied an essentialist view of African American culture and its history – one that could ignore those details in musicians' biographies which did not fit the critics' mythology about blackness. Moreover, the arguments of music critics were shaped, in some instances, by *racial* assumptions about black sexuality and bodies. From this perspective, Albert Ayler's *Truth is Marching In* could be read as:

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<sup>30</sup> Giacomo Pellicciotti, ‘Tra i nuovi profeti della black music: New york is now!’, *Gong*, n. 6, June 1976, pp. 30-35.

An explosive and enthralling piece based on the memory of New Orleans fanfares and the *orgiastic frenzy of African American pre-jazz music*. This memory is twisted and expanded through music, and so it is also an exciting promise for the future.<sup>31</sup> [my emphasis]

More generally, Ayler's free jazz could be seen as reflecting a deeper African American 'spirituality' charged with sexual (as well as political) meanings:

As always, African American people's spirituality is infused with sexuality, ancestral mythologies, visionary capacities, magic. But most importantly, this spirituality is a religion of the real. It is love for men and their destiny. As a result, it becomes the will of change.<sup>32</sup>

These assumptions about African American sexuality could surface in the writings of all the jazz writers of the monthlies. While the argument about African American jazz implied a perfect alignment between social marginality and aesthetic radicalism, critics' fascination with black culture was clearly entwined with assumptions about the nature of black people. As a result, critics could connect music to the 'blood' of black people as well as to the 'savage' nature of black culture, as shown by the examples below respectively.

When he [Sam Rivers] plays with energetic irrationality, we get back the ghosts of *the black rage and sensuality; the blood and not just the colour of an archaic origin*. But apart from these moments, Rivers cannot escape the ambiguity of most contemporary

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<sup>31</sup> Gino Castaldo, 'Zio Tom, Zio Sam, Zio Sax', *Muzak*, n. 3 (new series), June 1975, pp. 34-36.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

Black Music: the ambiguity of a discourse that screams desperation and nostalgia, rather than intentionally tackling the contradictions of the present.<sup>33</sup> [my emphasis]

Jeanne Lee is part of a creative scene which was totally marginalised in the past. She combines female expressivity, black culture and improvised music, that is, things and situations which disrupt and perturb the bourgeois morality [...] *This is a universe of witches, savages and drifters, which has nothing to do with aesthetic clichés.*<sup>34</sup> [my emphasis]

As with the coverage of rock music, the critics' encounter with jazz was mediated by the structure of the music press as a field. In this respect, *Ciao 2001* developed a very different take on jazz and the social identity of black musicians. The main responsible for the jazz coverage was the critic Dario Salvatori, who managed the jazz pages of *Ciao 2001* between 1973 and 1977. While his articles, like the ones published in the monthlies, could acknowledge the difficulties encountered by African American musicians in the US context, they did not use to praise their marginal position within the music industry. On the contrary, musicians' willingness to reach a broader audience was praised, as shown by the following article assessing the career of Albert Ayler.

The last twist in Ayler's career was received as the most scandalous. Facing the growing success of soul music, and with the aim of freeing himself, Ayler recorded 'New Grass', a valuable and brave album which made him visible beyond jazz circles. [...] This last turn to popular (rather than rock) music was never accepted. Perhaps

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<sup>33</sup> Peppo Delconte, 'Riflessi sul nuovo mito Sam Rivers. L'urlo sommerso', *Gong*, n. 10, October 1976, pp. 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> Franco Bolelli, 'Jeanne Lee. Una voce un corpo', *Gong*, n. 6, June 1976, pp. 25-27.



Ayler was simply tired of being without a job and playing for empty seats.<sup>35</sup>

Ayler's involvement with soul music could thus be framed as interesting from an aesthetic point of view, and as justifiable in light of the economic difficulties faced by the musician. Similarly, the success of an alternative jazz festival organised, in the early 1970s, by Sam Rivers and other musicians against the Newport Jazz Festival, was not seen as a proof of their marginal status, but as an example of professionalism.

[Sam Rivers's Rivbea Studio] has become a major centre for the festival that the most responsible musicians have polemically organised against [George] Vein's [Newport] [...] However, this kind of initiative should not be interpreted equivocally. The jazz festival organised by black musicians against Newport is even bigger than Newport itself, and this is fine. A lot of alternative initiatives end badly because of excessive sloppiness, but initiatives that are 'against' something do not need to be poorly organised. This is a big mistake that American musicians, luckily enough, have never committed.<sup>36</sup>

More generally, *Ciao 2001* did not frame jazz music as 'political', even if musicians had explicitly political intents. Moreover, explicit politicisation was not necessarily framed as a positive thing, especially if it was seen as undermining the artistic quality of music. In sharp contrast with *Muzak* and *Gong*, thus, creativity was not seen as a natural ally of political purposes.

Unfortunately, [Archie] Shepp's performance in Bergamo has proven that a certain

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<sup>35</sup> Dario Salvatori, 'Il leone nero', *Ciao 2001*, n. 26, 6 July 1974, pp. 27-28.

<sup>36</sup> Dario Salvatori, 'Sam Rivers. Diabolico e sottovalutato', *Ciao 2001*, n. 12, 28 March 1976, p. 26.

kind of music, beyond its political contents and African tunics, has not much to offer. The audience did not hiss the performance of course, because they knew the importance of Shepp's figure and his relationship with the Black Power, but perhaps he deserved to leave the stage more than anyone else. The musicians on stage appeared completely lost and without inspiration.<sup>37</sup>

More generally, free and avant-garde were not seen as the most representative tendencies within jazz. As with the coverage of soul and disco, *Ciao 2001* had a more inclusive strategy, and did not connect its identity as a magazine to the destiny of any particular genre. As a result, it used to publish articles about musicians working at the boundaries between jazz and soul (e.g. George Benson, Stanley Turrentine), as well as acts representing a more traditional approach to jazz (e.g. Bunny Foy, Dexter Gordon). Moreover, in contrast to *Muzak* and *Gong*, *Ciao 2001* framed jazz's popularity among Italian youth as a passing fad, rather as a case of 'alignment' between creative music and the political demands of the Italian youth cultures.

During the last three or four years, there has been an incredible rise of interest in jazz music among young people. A fall of interest for rock and other kinds of music has been accompanied by a focus on African American music, which had never been popular in Italy. [However] [a]s we have noticed in several occasions, the jazz-boom was a superficial phenomenon. Eventually it revealed itself as a passing cultural fad; one with significant ambiguities. Nowadays jazz is something for a few people, like in the 1950s.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Dario Salvatori, 'Bergamo. L'Art Ensemble non salva il jazz', *Ciao 2001*, 7 April 1974, n. 14, pp. 12-15.

<sup>38</sup> Dario Salvatori, 'Jazz-estate: lo ascolteremo ancora?', *Ciao 2001*, n. 19, 15 May 1977, p. 31.

Overall, the evaluation of black musicians was not supported by a political reading of African American culture, and an overt politicisation of this culture could even be framed as an inconsistent argument escaping both aesthetic and economic considerations. More generally, the comparison between the jazz coverage of *Ciao 2001* and the monthlies shows the extent to which ethnicity and race became a symbolic stake within the field. Framing the social identity of black musicians as something other and radical, the monthlies defined avant-garde jazz as in line with their cultural project of ‘engaged’ cultural criticism, while *Ciao 2001*’s attentiveness to changing market trends was largely in contradiction with a similar project. As a result, it evaluated jazz primarily as an aesthetic fact and adopting a broader strategy of coverage. Moreover, the magazine did not conceive of jazz as the new ‘centre’ of the Italian youth culture, but as one of the many ‘fads and fashions’ (Hirsch 1972) animating its cultural life. More generally, this section has shown that the social identity of musicians can shape the evaluation of both their music and the broader cultural tradition which they are taken to embody. As a result, black identities as well as bodies could inform a broader conception of what jazz, and African American culture, were supposed to be. The final section explores the ways in which a similar process was at work with the evaluation of women musicians.

#### **7.4 Music and the politics of gender**

As anticipated in Chapters 1 and 2, several studies have shown that the coverage of popular music provided by both newspapers and specialised magazines has been historically biased toward male musicians (Schmutz 2009), as well as characterised

by differences in the discursive tropes through which women are framed. In this respect, Davies (2001) has shown that American rock journalists addressing women musicians used to also evaluate their bodies and sexuality. Similarly, it has been argued that women, as musicians, can be framed as dependent on other creative sources (e.g. partners, other musicians and so on) and as emotionally 'pathological' and passive individuals (Leonard 2007, Schmutz and Faupel 2010). Overall, existing research on the evaluation of musicians shows that women have less visibility within the popular musical canon than men, but also that they are *made visible* in rather different ways.

The coverage of Italian music magazines follows some of these trends. While devoting a limited amount of coverage to women musicians,<sup>39</sup> Italian magazines used to evaluate women's music along with their womanhood and sexuality. However, in contrast with the findings of the aforementioned studies, after 1975 Italian critics have explicitly addressed the gendered dimension of musical labour. More specifically, they could both recognise and criticise the existence of gender inequalities within the musical field and society at large (see also Chapter 8). Moreover, gender was subject to the same field dynamics explored in the case of ethnicity and race. In other words, it became a symbolic stake, a category in relation to which critics and magazines could *take position*. As I show below, this tendency was marked by a significant ambivalence: while acknowledging that women musicians were discriminated against in a number of ways, critics still framed their work and trajectory through the lens of (heteronormative) sexuality. As a result, arguments about the quality of their music remained related to considerations of their qualities as women.

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<sup>39</sup> See Appendix C.

A tendency towards sexualising women surfaces in articles about rock, jazz, soul and folk. More specifically, the encounter of critics with these musical traditions, and the way in which they conceived of their social meaning, could change markedly when such genres were embodied by women rather than men. For example, the *politics of history* examined above in relation to rock music could become a discourse about the sexual fantasies embodied by Grace Slick (songwriter and singer of the American band Jefferson Airplane) for a whole generation.

[Grace Slick was] a tender face with long hair singing the highest virtues of the hippy generation. She got into our veins two million albums ago, singing ‘Don't you need somebody to love?’ with her simple skirt and a flower on the microphone, [...] We had not experienced everyday struggle yet, and Grace was the idealised fantasy of our first sexual intercourses.<sup>40</sup>

[The song *Sketches of China*] represents Grace as a woman and her burning fire, which makes her the prototype of sexuality despite the way she looks. This fire literally explodes in *Manhole*, her second and last LP [...] Grace Slick enlivens (and lives through) a synthesis of love and music, gathering around her the hope of millions of young people.<sup>41</sup>

In a similar fashion, the following example connects Maddy Prior's physical appearance to the social qualities ascribed to the genre she represents (British folk-rock).

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<sup>40</sup> Riccardo Bertonecelli, ‘Grace Slick, Ascolta la mia lingua nel tuo orecchio’, *Gong*, n. 3, March, 1975, pp. 15-18.

<sup>41</sup> Alessandro Branco, ‘The fire woman’, *Muzak*, n. 12, October 1974, pp. 56-58.

Maddy Prior is not beautiful. In fact she is the first one to make jokes about what she calls 'my smiling horse kind of face'. Nevertheless, she emanates a weird charm – one which perhaps is similar to the charm the Gaelic peasant attributed to the angelic heroines of the folk ballads learnt from his father... sweetness, harmony, but most of all a light and impalpable spirituality. These same qualities live through Maddy Prior's body and voice when she is on stage, which make her the focal point of Steeleye Span's shows.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, musicians challenging traditional representations of femininity could be singled out precisely for lacking such qualities, as in the following description of Patti Smith on stage:

[When she is on stage] Patty changes personality. Her muscles get stretched; the face, already skinny and pale, becomes a mask and the body gets convulsant. She jumps all around the stage, screaming desperation through the microphone [...] *This woman, who has nothing of a woman*, is exhausted after the show; she is all sweaty and dirty for having crawled on the floor like a rock 'n' roll animal.<sup>43</sup> [my emphasis]

This tendency of evaluating women as women, and not simply as musicians, never disappeared from the coverage of Italian magazines. However, since 1975 music critics started showing a higher awareness of gender inequalities. In this respect, 1975 was the year when the feminist movement gained national visibility in Italy, and its rise was considered a sign of progressive social change by music critics (Chapter 6). As a result, magazines like *Ciao 2001* and *Gong* published special

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<sup>42</sup> Marco Ferranti, 'Le Silly Sisters del folk inglese', *Ciao 2001*, n. 20, 23 May 1976, p. 33.

<sup>43</sup> Maria Laura Giulietti, 'Patti Smith: Rock 'n' roll animal', *Ciao 2001*, n. 9, 7 March 1977, pp. 42-43.

features about women's discrimination within the music industry.<sup>44</sup> More generally, several musical features published after 1975 evaluate women musicians showing awareness of gender inequalities, as shown by the following example about the Italian jazz composer Patrizia Sciascitelli.

If you look at the history of jazz you will see that, with the exception of some singers, there are only a few female figures [...] A good number of pianists has emerged, like Mary Lou Williams, but she is quite old now. Last year, the English Marian McPartland played very well at some summer festivals, but these names are over fifty now, and belong to the 'mainstream'. There are some figures of high creative value [...] Carla Bley, Annette Peacock, Barbara Thompson and few others. However they are all experimental musicians, whose background is in jazz but their music looks elsewhere. The only young woman showing a rich jazz feeling, and who is interested in making fresh music, is the Italian Patrizia Scascitelli.<sup>45</sup>

This tendency emerges from *Ciao 2001*, *Gong* and *Muzak* as well. However, as already anticipated, there were significant *field effects* in the way magazines developed their gender politics. In this respect, *Gong* made a stronger symbolic investment in women's struggles, publishing articles which proposed a proper feminist musical aesthetic. More specifically, some critics (particularly Franco Bolelli and Gloria Mattioni) argued that women's social struggles were being *reflected* by the music of some female musicians working between jazz and the avant-garde, such as Jeanne Lee, Meredith Monks and Zusaan Fasteau. As for African American jazz, the magazine argued the sonic structures produced by these

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<sup>44</sup> Giorgio Riviaccio, 'Rock al femminile', *Ciao 2001*, n. 17, 2 May 1976, pp. 37-38; Giacomo Pellicciotti, 'Sulle tracce del suono femminile: Jazzwomen', *Gong*, n. 3, March 1976, pp. 24-27.

<sup>45</sup> Dario Salvatori, 'Patrizia Scascitelli. Jazzfemmina', *Ciao 2001*, n. 34-35, 7 September 1975, pp. 45-46.

musicians were intrinsically political and reflected their social identity. This position is expressed in the following example, which criticises the idea that a feminist approach to music should necessarily lead to music with socio-political lyrics.

There is a basic misunderstanding among women, namely the idea that the specificity of women's condition [*specificità femminile*] can be expressed without music (sounds, structures...) and focusing on speech and story-telling as means to describe women's experiences [*vissuto*]. A typical example is the proliferation of [female] singer-songwriters who express the words of women with the sonic structures of men. [...] [We have to] express the female condition through sonic structures, instruments and the voice. Only in this way can an autonomous female expressivity exist – one which is not subaltern and does not have to rely on the structures created by others.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, *Gong* displayed the same fundamental ambiguity of the other magazines in the way it addressed gender. More specifically, critics could still conceive of women's music as expressing something fundamentally 'sexual' while acknowledging their subordination within musical canons and society at large.

Jeanne Lee's voice is the direct expression of a freed sexual fantasy [...] Her exploration of the voice's resources is entwined with a re-appropriation of the body. It is against the allure of superstar celebrity and is for a different understanding of sexuality – a black sexuality that is not commodified as it happens with rhythm 'n' blues, which displays an apparently uninhibited but ultimately imprisoned and stereotypical sexuality.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Gloria Mattioni, 'Travestite o liberate dalla subalternità', *Gong*, n. 9, September 1977, pp. 38-39.

<sup>47</sup> Franco Bolelli, 'Jeanne Lee. Una voce un corpo', *Gong*, n. 6, June 1976, pp. 25-27.



In a similar fashion, the music of the soul act Labelle could be framed by *Muzak* as expressing a ‘freed’ sexuality. The article, while defining Labelle's music as encoding a ‘feminist message’, was still based on a sexualised view of women's musical work. Moreover, when critics addressed African American women, their considerations of the sexual politics of music were reinforced by unacknowledged assumptions about the *nature* of the black sexuality, as it happens with both the former example about Jeanne Lee and the following one about Labelle.

When Patty and her sisters sing one of their wild tunes, they become a female entity that screams its femininity over the faces of the audience [...] Labelle, *the lady of the jungle, engages with the audience with clear and swinging sexual implications*. She is not a sexy stereotype for lonely men; her provocation is for everyone: men, women and homosexuals. And it is not based on the repression of the audience. On the contrary, it is an incentive to freely discover the joy of our own sexuality whatever it might be.<sup>48</sup> [my emphasis]

Finally, the priority given to music considered aesthetically valuable could support stigmatising comparisons with women making ‘debased’ kinds of music. These women could be framed as conformist and unintelligent through pejorative metaphors, such as in the following article comparing the ‘good’ music of Donatella Bardi (an Italian singer-songwriter) with the majority of Italian women musicians.

Donatella Bardi is an Italian singer with a different background than the majority of

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<sup>48</sup> Danilo Moroni, ‘Labelle’, *Muzak*, n. 7 (new series), November 1975, p. 46.

her colleagues. In fact, while male musicians have developed ‘different’ musical discourses in recent years, for women, the identification with standard models seems inescapable. Donatella started singing within a certain Milanese pop milieu [...] where she could sing in a creative fashion *without being forced to sing about ‘engagements’ like basically every female singer in Italy. [...] Keep an eye on her name; she is a musician, not one of those bimbo singers.*<sup>49</sup> [my emphasis]

Similarly, the ‘modest’ artistic achievements of Joni Mitchell could be connected to a similarly dismissive evaluation of her womanhood.

As a woman, she is sufficiently receptive and self-confident to escape the most habitual norms of conduct, but she is not sufficiently autonomous to reach an unique expressive originality [...] She is ironic, open-minded, intelligent and so tender [*tenerissima*]. She has the most refined and less reified [*reificate*] qualities of a non-liberated woman. In other words, [she represents] the ghost of freedom...<sup>50</sup>

These examples show that an awareness of gender inequalities and differences did not change the focus on women as a ‘genre’ in themselves and as sexual objects. Furthermore, the relative reflexivity of critics about gender issues did not translate into a public reflection about gender *within* the music press. This is a particularly important question as magazines like *Muzak* and *Gong* gave regular space to feminism, sexuality and gender as topics of discussion on their pages, especially from 1975 onwards. Indeed, both the magazines hosted a few feminist activists

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<sup>49</sup> Marco Dani, ‘Donatella Bardi’, *Muzak*, n. 12 (new series), April 1976, p. 44.

<sup>50</sup> Franco Bolelli, ‘Ancora su Joni Mitchell: Canzoni, teneri frammenti, fantasmi di libertà’, *Gong*, n. 4, April 1977, pp. 31-33.

writing about such topics,<sup>51</sup> and *Muzak* even had a woman as its co-editor in chief from July 1975. However, as anticipated in Chapter 5, the few women writing for the monthlies rarely addressed music: as they wrote about feminism, gender and sexuality, and in some cases (Francesca Grazzini) about other social issues, the musical discourse remained mostly in the hands of male writers. By contrast, while some women wrote regularly about music in *Ciao 2001*, they remained a small minority.<sup>52</sup> By and large, critics' awareness of the way gender inequalities shaped music production, as well as the lives of their readers (Chapter 8), did not produce significant changes in the way similar imbalances shaped the music press.<sup>53</sup>

## 7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the ways in which critics carried out music's evaluation. In line with the framework developed in previous chapters, I have argued that critics' engagement with music can be conceptualised in a *relational* fashion. More specifically, I have argued that critics' evaluations were the product of a *social encounter* between actors occupying a specific national and institutional position, and music genres endowed with distinctive sonic and socio-historical properties. In Bourdieusian terms, this can be conceptualised as an encounter between two histories: the social history of Italian music critics, and the trajectories of genres and musicians that had been introduced only recently within the Italian

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<sup>51</sup> Lidia Ravera and Agnese De Donato wrote almost regularly about such topics in *Muzak*; in *Gong*, they were addressed frequently by Gloria Mattioni and Emina Cevro-Vukotic. A number of other women wrote about gender and sexuality in the monthlies, but only on an occasional basis.

<sup>52</sup> Maria Laura Giulietti was among the main critics of *Ciao 2001* between 1973 and 1977. The other women writing regularly for the weekly (but to a lesser extent than Giulietti) were Fiorella Gentile, Mimi J. Silva and Barbara Woods. As for the monthlies, there were other women contributing to the magazines' contents, but they did not usually write about music. See Chapter 5 (table 5.3) for an overview of how gender structured the field.

<sup>53</sup> This raises a number of further issues, which I could not explore during the fieldwork, such as *why* this happened and *how* this gendered division of labour was experienced by women and/or discussed within editorial boards. These questions would require a different methodology than the one devised for this thesis.

cultural space (as I discussed in Chapter 5). In this respect, I have argued that musicians acted as *embodied histories* activating critics' habitus and informing their evaluations. I have also shown, from this standpoint, that the social identities and bodies of musicians could become themselves objects of evaluation shaping the meanings that critics ascribed to musical works and genres.

By and large, I have argued that the aesthetic disposition of critics was not simply projected onto inert objects of evaluation. On the contrary, different genres enabled critics' reflections about the meaning and social value of music in different ways: hard rock aroused discussions about music's emotional power and the very quality of such emotions; pop-rock music problematised a generational musical habitus that had been shaped by the reception of 1960s rock culture; and free jazz enabled discussions about social struggle and the political value of music. Moreover, in sharp contrast to the invisibility of maleness (and whiteness), black musicians and women elicited evaluative discourses about both their music and social identity.

Finally, I have shown that the structure of the field had a profound effect on critics' evaluations. In this respect, American and British popular music, as well as other genres,<sup>54</sup> were mediated by a structured and diversified field of cultural evaluation.

I will now turn to a different practice, one which was as important as music reviewing in critics' understanding of the field: the publication and mediation of readers' letters.

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<sup>54</sup> While English and American popular music were covered extensively, Italian magazines addressed also other genres which I have not included in the discussion for reasons of space. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the popular success enjoyed by the Chilean folk revival (*Nueva Canción Chilena*) in Italy, a music trend that the magazines addressed between 1974 and 1977.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Making sense of cultural and social identities: magazines as technologies of reflexivity**

This chapter explores the social functions of music magazines for their audience.

Drawing on the analysis of readers' letters published by *Ciao 2001*, *Gong* and *Muzak*, it focuses on two entwined issues. On the one hand, it analyses the ways in which critics and readers, through the magazines, made sense of different musical tastes and listening practices. On the other hand, it explores the extent to which discussions of musical practices turned into reflections about social identities, differences and privileges. The chapter argues that magazines acted as *technologies of reflexivity* for their audience, that is, as a means through which readers could publicly reflect about cultural practices and social differences. More specifically, magazines were means through which critics and readers defined similarities and differences, and through which forms of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1984), but also tolerance and solidarity, could be expressed.

From a theoretical point of view, the chapter interrogates Bourdieu's notion of homology (Bourdieu 1984, 1996), that is the idea that cultural producers and their audience occupy a similar position within the national social space (see Chapter 3). In this respect, I argue that since Italian music critics had to address a socially diverse young audience,<sup>1</sup> social differences among readers, and between critics and readers, became an issue of frequent debate requiring a significant degree of symbolic labour on the part of critics. This made homology (that is, similarities and differences in social position and cultural resources) an explicit topic of debate,

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 5 for a discussion about the audience of Italian music magazines.

rather than a social arrangement beyond the comprehension of readers and critics. Further, the chapter integrates Bourdieu's attention to forms of symbolic violence with a consideration of *strategic tolerance*. In other words, I will show that practices of social inclusion and cultural tolerance were integral to the logic of the field (particularly for the magazine *Ciao 2001*). Finally, the chapter shows that while critics conceived of magazines as a means of democratic discussion, the way in which they addressed their readers reveal different agendas and conceptions of debate. For example, the high level of cultural capital required by the monthlies to 'join the debate' could turn them into a resource which was difficult to access for some readers. More generally, the interactions between critics and readers were shaped by *field effects* due to the different positions which magazines occupied within the music press. The chapter, then, shows that magazines acted as means of *regulated reflexivity*, that is, they defined clear cultural boundaries pertaining to both topics of discussion and styles of intervention.

### **8.1 Music magazines as means of debate**

Chapter 7 has shown that the evaluation of different music genres was a key institutional practice for critics – one defining the specificity of popular music criticism as a cultural field. However, critics devoted significant efforts and resources to a different practice as well, namely the ongoing publication and mediation of readers' letters. More specifically, there was significant ideological investment in the idea that the popular music press should be a space of debate open to the discussion of other subjects, such as readers and, to a lesser extent, musicians and other figures involved with the production and consumption of music. *Ciao 2001*, for example, was conceived of by the editorial board as a means to exchange opinions, which

should have for the youth culture the same function that newspapers had for their public.

[Ciao 2001 is] a vehicle of opinion. The interpreter of both your world-view and a society that you desire to change [...] [I]t is a means to exchange opinions and, most of all, an opportunity to discuss problems that usually are ignored even by the 'great independent press'.<sup>2</sup>

In order to perform this function, the magazine implemented a range of thematic sections devoted to the readers' letters. In particular, the section managed by the editor-in-chief (*Lettere al Direttore*) was the means through which the line of the magazine was justified vis-à-vis the critiques of readers, but it was also a space in which a wider range of topics was discussed on a regular basis (see below)<sup>3</sup>

Although devoting less space to the conversation with readers – a monthly section ranging between 2 and 4 pages – *Muzak* and *Gong* also employed this space to discuss their cultural politics and other topics spanning from musical tastes to political practices. Moreover, the monthlies conceived of discussions with readers as a practice defining the identity of popular music criticism vis-à-vis other forms of intellectual labour.

*Muzak* means also a different way of looking at things, an intelligent and critical one. It also means, and will mean more and more, a new way of conceiving of the dialogue between readers and the magazine [...]. This has always been our intention, albeit we have not always been able to meet the challenge. Since we are not among the 'saints' of culture [*santoni della cultura*], and do not want to share anything with them, we

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<sup>2</sup> Saverio Rotondi, 'Cari lettori e cari amici', *Ciao 2001*, n. 48, 2 December 1973, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4, it is on such sections that I based my analysis of readers' letters.

feel that there is still a lot to do in order to become truly progressive and free ourselves from regressive attitudes.<sup>4</sup>

We want to realise all the things that so far, for lack of pragmatism or realism, have not been attempted in Italy. The important thing is to work seriously and together. [...] This monthly will never become a ghetto for a few learned intellectuals [*pennaioli*] writing their own memories as a form of masturbation. This is a space where EVERYONE [sic] is welcome to play his own *Gong*.<sup>5</sup>

The monthlies, thus, saw the ongoing debate with readers as a practice distinguishing popular music criticism from high culture and traditional cultural institutions (and from the elitism associated with them). However, there were significant differences in the way critics conceived of the debate with readers and thus the social function of music magazines. For example, both *Muzak* and *Gong* conceived of the letters published by *Ciao 2001* as the expression of a 'youngish' culture based on superficial topics of discussion (e.g. fashion and sport), silliness and emotional immaturity. Moreover, *Ciao 2001* was seen as a quintessentially conservative media providing recommendations infused with moralism and Catholic ideology (particularly through its section devoted to the 'psychological' problems of readers).

The relationship with our readers is not based on the 'youngish' sort of participation encouraged by some magazines. We will not let any space become the 'dilettante's spot', filled with readers' pics and silly lyrics [*poesiola*]. Also, we will not accept any suggestions on casual fashion [*moda casual*] or the advice of a psychologist.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Collettivo Redazionale, 'Referendumuzak', *Muzak*, n. 5, March 1974, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Anonymous, no title, *Gong*, n. 2, November 1974, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Antonino Antonucci Ferrara, no title, *Gong*, n. 1 (year 4<sup>th</sup>), January 1977, p. 7.



2001 drowns in the nonsense [*barzellette*] of its parish-style psychoanalyst. [...] [it is] a little magazine that still believes in the disputes between Zappa and [Captain] Beefheart, and which argues with impunity that marijuana makes people impotent, an argument worthy of Fanfani [Christian Democrat politician].<sup>7</sup>

In this respect, the social function of music magazines was an issue of contestation subject to the field dynamics already explored in the previous chapters. These institutional differences also emerge through the thematic analysis of the letters published by different magazines (**table 8.1**).<sup>8</sup>

**Table 8.1, Topics of debate**

<i>Ciao 2001, Muzak and Gong</i>
Cultural politics of the magazines (111)
Music (79)
Music and politics (55)
Music and sexuality/gender (20)
Music and age (17)
Politics and society (58)
Social differences and inequality:
- Class/social privilege (42)
- Sexuality/gender (22)
- City/periphery (16)
- North/South (17)
- Other (2)

<sup>7</sup> Giaime Pintor, 'Contrappunti ai fatti: musica in movimento', *Muzak*, n. 5 (new series), September 1975, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4, the analysis is based on a sample of 487 letters, which includes all letters published by the monthlies and a purposive sample of those published by *Ciao 2001*. The number of themes is higher than the number of letters, as a single letter used to address more than one theme.

**Table 8.1, Topics of debate (cont'd)**

<i>Ciao 2001</i>
Friendship (20)
Relationships with parents (14)
Love (7)
Religious beliefs (3)
Other (sport, animals) (2)
<i>Muzak and Gong</i>
Elitism/difficult language (30)

By and large, the analysis shows that readers used letters to reflect on a wide range of issues: while music was a prominent topic of debate, discussions about music frequently became arguments about broader social questions (e.g. politics, inequality and social differences). Readers, then, could also write to the magazines to discuss political and social issues without mentioning music. The analysis, then, shows that while the magazines published letters addressing a number of similar topics, the way they selected letters for publication was likely to follow significantly different logics. By and large, *Ciao 2001* was more inclusive of topics of discussion, publishing letters about the common everyday experiences of its readers (e.g. relationship with parents, friendship, love and religious beliefs). By contrast, such topics barely appeared on the pages of *Muzak* and *Gong* during the same years (1973-1977).<sup>9</sup> The strongest differences, however, emerge in the ways critics addressed the concerns of readers. The next sections, for reasons of space, will not explore all topics emerging from the thematic analysis, but will focus on discussions about

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<sup>9</sup> The greater inclusivity of *Ciao 2001* is also due to the fact that it was a weekly, which as such used to publish a higher number of letters than the monthlies. An analysis taking into account a broader sample and/or the other sections devoted to readers' letters might reveal an even more inclusive stance.

listening practices and social differences.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the interventions of readers in such topics, and the way they were addressed by critics, are indicative of the extent to which magazines could act as means of regulated reflexivity for young music enthusiasts.

## **8.2 Making sense of cultural practices: taste, aesthetic dispositions and styles of intervention**

Through the publication of letters, Italian magazines fostered an ongoing reflection about different musical tastes and listening practices. More specifically, they made possible a collective evaluation of different ways of listening, that is the aesthetic dispositions (Bourdieu 1984) that readers could assume towards music. *Contra* a view of consumption practices as largely unreflexive (Bourdieu 1984), this section shows that magazines acted as a means through which both readers and critics could make sense of different ways of listening. However, since critics intervened in such discussions according to their own institutional agendas, they evaluated the choices of readers vis-à-vis specific cultural hierarchies, that is, the ones they were promoting as critics. In this respect, different tastes and listening practices could be either encouraged or stigmatised, and critics could perform either practices of symbolic violence or promote a relative cultural tolerance.

### *8.2.1 Strategic cultural tolerance*

While the monthlies defined strong distinctions between both different kinds of music and ways of listening (see below), the approach of *Ciao 2001* to the choices of readers implied a principle of *strategic cultural tolerance*. More specifically, Saverio

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<sup>10</sup> The discussion draws specifically on the following themes: Music, music and politics, music and sexuality/gender, class/social privilege, and elitism/difficult language.

Rotondi, the person who usually answered their letters, used to promote respect for choices that did not necessarily match the preferences expressed by the magazine and its critics. Some readers, for example, were critical of the exclusion of Italian light music from the magazine's coverage, and more generally they questioned the bias of critics towards commercial music.

I do not appreciate the disdain and lack of interest that your magazine shows for what you call commercial bands, like the fabulous Pooh, Alunni del Sole and Nomadi [Italian bands]. Are they commercial? Fine, but I like their music!<sup>11</sup>

In such instances, while sustaining a distinction between commercial and avant-garde music, and while situating *Ciao 2001* as closer to the latter, Rotondi supported the readers' freedom of choice as an intrinsic value, and did not completely exclude the possibility that some commercial music could be addressed by the magazine.

There is neither disdain nor lack of interest in our attitude toward more commercial bands. We even addressed the best instances of their production. However, *Ciao 2001* looks at the most interesting musical expressions, which usually have nothing to do with the most commercial music. We do not disdain this kind of music, we just prefer to not be its advocates and reporters. However, everyone is free to listen to his favourite music, even the most commercial. One will always find the broadest and most objective information on our magazine, at least for the sectors of our interest.<sup>12</sup>

A relative cultural tolerance was displayed not only in relation to music genres deemed as commercial, but also towards 'emotional' ways of listening. These

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<sup>11</sup> Giovanni Forace, 'I complessi commerciali', *Ciao 2001*, n. 14, 11 April 1976, pp. 5-6.

<sup>12</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Forace, *ibid.*

listening practices can be conceptualised as popular dispositions toward music (Bourdieu 1984: 9-62). Indeed, the readers displaying such attitudes praised the emotional and bodily experience of music over its (detached) artistic appreciation.

An album of Gary [Glitter] [...] really gets under my skin, it gives me feelings that I cannot get from the boring music of Pink Floyd, Yes, EL&P, Santana, etc. I find it particularly annoying when Slade and the like are accused of being commercial, as [more serious] bands like Deep Purple and Yes pretend millions to play a concert or to appear in a TV show.<sup>13</sup>

I admit that the Osmonds are not among the greatest performers in pop music, but they are not that bad and I am crazy for them. Please answer me, do let me know if you think that the Osmonds are not worthy of your magazine; I will save 250 *lire* [Italian old coin] a week.<sup>14</sup>

While ascribing a higher value to music displaying recognisable artistic qualities, the magazine did not discriminate against the passionate relationship of these readers with their favourite musicians, and framed it as a respectable disposition.

The market [*la commercialità*], in our society, mediates every process and attitude, even in the realms of culture and the arts. In this respect, it commodifies both the most sublime of intuitions and the most deplorable utilitarianism [*utilitarismo*]. However, there is still a difference between the two, at least in terms of intention [...] so it is undeniable that there is a difference between Yes and Gary Glitter. However, even your position deserves respect. But you should provide convincing motivations in order to sustain that there is something authentic and innovative in Glitter, Sweet and

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<sup>13</sup> Massimo Cimini, 'Ribolle il sangue', *Ciao 2001*, n. 25, 23 June 1974, pp. 5-7.

<sup>14</sup> Elena (no surname), 'Io vado pazza per gli Osmonds', *Ciao 2001*, n. 8, 24 February 1974, pp. 5-7.

Slade.<sup>15</sup>

Dear Elena, I respect your sympathy for the Osmonds [...] Do you think, dear Elena, that *Ciao 2001* should be bought only if it talks (and positively) about the Osmonds? I hope you will decide to remain one of 'us', even if this time we have different opinions.<sup>16</sup>

The cultural tolerance promoted by *Ciao 2001* had a clear strategic dimension, as shown also by the last excerpt. Indeed, respect for different musical preferences and ways of listening was part of a cultural politics downplaying strong aesthetic distinctions in favour of an inclusive stance that could be adapted to the diverse attitudes of young music enthusiasts as well as to a changing musical market (as shown by the magazine's coverage of disco music: see Chapter 7). This approach could also be justified as a more professional way of doing music criticism. More specifically, Rotondi frequently mobilised the idea of 'objective journalism' in order to define the magazine as an informative media which does not 'manipulate' readers. It is from this perspective that the magazine could accept even a purely 'functionalist' relationship with disco music.

Tell me how is it possible to dance to Led Zeppelin or CSNY [Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young] [...] disco music has a relaxing effect on me, especially considering that I usually listen to more demanding music [*musica impegnata*] at home. So I get relaxed when I go to the disco.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Cimini, *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Elena, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Antonio Palmieri, 'Polemica su David Bowie', *Ciao 2001*, n. 21, 29 May 1977, pp. 5-6.

[Ciao 2001 is] a magazine that takes into account the international music scene in its entirety. It does not manipulate the decisions of readers and does provide real ‘information’. This is what we do, more generally, with the problems of the youth, like unemployment, school and the university. And this is the way we will keep following.<sup>18</sup>

However, too loose aesthetic boundaries, as well as total cultural tolerance, could not always be maintained. In this respect, the rejection of Italian light music and its social world was key for *Ciao 2001* (as discussed in Chapter 5). It was a cultural and social distinction sustaining the identity of the magazine as a youth media committed to avant-garde popular music. As a result, the transgression of this distinction by readers could not be easily tolerated. This emerges as a particularly problematic issue in the following letter, as the reader explicitly connects the disdain for Italian light music to a form of social distinction.

Critics define as ignorant and narrow-minded [*gretti*] those young people who enjoy Deep Purple and Sweet, and they are pitiless with those buying Pooh, Camaleonti, Mina or Papetti [Italian light acts]. Well, even if some people do enjoy Orietta Berti's music, what would you have to say? The records which sell the most in Italy are those of Papetti, Mina or Domenico Modugno. One must also take this type of music into account rather than stigmatising it, otherwise you also stigmatise those who like this music [...] If you do not like it, you can simply stop listening. We should respect the others. I am in my twenties and I think we should not encourage desires of overthrow and distinction [*distinzione*].<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Palmieri, *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Annibale Angelozzi, ‘Grave lacuna’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 37, 21 September 1975, pp. 5-6. It is worth stressing that the reader employs the word distinction (*distinzione*), that is, he is perfectly capable of describing the social mechanism that Pierre Bourdieu was studying in the same years (see Bourdieu 1984), and which he conceived of as a largely ‘unconscious social practice’. For a critique of this view

While maintaining a principle of respect for such tastes, Rotondi had to defend the boundaries which sustained both the identity of *Ciao 2001* and the cultural logic of popular music criticism.

No one here wants to denigrate a certain kind of culture (?) or music, but we want to discuss and report on what we think is authentic music and culture. This is, of course, an explicit choice. I do not understand why we should take into account things, which, frankly speaking, are objectively debased. I am thinking of celebrity culture [*divismo*], a certain kind of sugary light songs [*canzonettismo mieloso*], and the regrettable habits that we [Italians] have inherited thanks to the RAI. Everyone, if willing, is free to follow this way or any other way, but we are as free to try to support culture, or at least what we consider authentic culture.<sup>20</sup>

Respect for the choices of readers could not support overly fleeting aesthetic distinctions. More generally, the rejection of Italian light music was crucial in defining the magazine as a specialised media addressing the youth culture, and whose success was based on a careful balance between highbrow cultural criticism and openness to diverse market trends. In contrast, while the monthlies similarly encouraged readers to reflect on different musical tastes, they addressed their choices in a very different way. Cultural tolerance was indeed replaced by different forms of symbolic violence establishing strong boundaries between good and bad music, expertise and lack of cultural capital, but also between appropriate and inappropriate ways of debating.

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see Bottero (2010).

<sup>20</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Angelozzi, *ibid.*



### 8.2.2 Symbolic violence

While *Ciao 2001* assumed with readers what can be defined as a strategic, albeit limited, cultural tolerance; *Muzak* and *Gong* adopted a different stance towards their musical tastes. Initially, both magazines did not want to be associated with an excessively dogmatic approach to music and culture. Indeed, as shown in the first section, the critics who launched *Muzak* and *Gong* conceived of such magazines as a means of democratic discussion and did not want to encourage a ‘sacred’ (that is, elitist) view of their work.

Letters with suggestions and critiques are more than welcome [...] We believe that a music magazine should foster discussions about music between journalists and readers. We do not believe in the existence of a single taste or a single, absolute aesthetic rule. We also do not think that musicians' technical proficiency is a bad thing in itself. In fact we have no beliefs at all [...]. We leave things like catechisms [*catechismi*], censures and last verdicts about progressive music to those believing that the critic has a sacred role and that he should use his sword to separate the good from the evil.<sup>21</sup>

While the idea of criticism as an open and ongoing debate between producers and consumers was never abandoned by the two magazines, the way in which they addressed the choices of readers implies both a more normative approach to taste, and a clear distinction between appropriate and inappropriate ways of debating. More specifically, readers criticising the magazines' line or defending musical choices different to theirs could be subject to distinctive forms of symbolic violence, as shown by the following discussion about Pink Floyd.

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<sup>21</sup> Editorial Board, Answer to Pietro Cavanna, *Muzak*, n. 3, December 1973, pp. 4-5.

Bertoncelli and Fumagalli [*Gong's* critics] are deaf to the fame and cleverness that the Pink [Floyd] have demonstrated in the last eight years of their career; eight years spent developing something original and different within the international music scene [...] For Bertoncelli and Fumagalli, the Pink [Floyd] are idiots and their fans – hundreds of millions all over the world – remain an inexplicable mystery.<sup>22</sup>

The critic answering the letter (Riccardo Bertoncelli) questioned both the opinion that Pink Floyd were an artistically valuable band, and the arguments through which the readers made their point. Their critique was indeed framed as culturally poor and not ‘critically relevant’.

Perhaps being deaf to the fame of Pink Floyd might be a sign of mental hygiene. And perhaps we should stop judging music only on the basis of its commercial success, especially when there is a whole myth about some musicians. It is not clear why one should ‘respect’ such myths, maybe it takes some courage to do the opposite [...] In your letter there was not a single justification about why the last Pink [Floyd] should be considered either good or bad. Be honest, apart from arguments about the ‘fame’, the ‘fans’ and the mass cult [for Pink Floyd], we have not read anything critically relevant. Write again if you want, but make critiques worthy of their name.<sup>23</sup>

Symbolic violence was not simply displayed towards readers' musical choices, but towards their *style of intervention*. In this respect, readers' interventions could be stigmatised both for the use of unconvincing arguments, and for a language lacking subtlety or displaying an overly aggressive tone. This is what happens with the

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<sup>22</sup> Maurizio Torrissi, Nico Libra, Conci Mazzullo, no title, *Gong*, n. 12 (year 2<sup>nd</sup>), December 1975, pp. 3-4.

<sup>23</sup> Riccardo Bertoncelli, Answer to Torrissi, Libra, Mazzullo, *ibid.*

following letter, a critique of an article about Soft Machine written by *Muzak's* editor-in-chief (Giaime Pintor).

We are astounded [...] why did the editorial collective allow the publication of such a piece of shit? Perhaps the editorial collective did not want to disagree with the director? But let's get to the point. The article's long and insignificant introduction is out of place: you put together Riley, Beethoven, Mozart and Stockhausen with a disconcerting ease, as if they were courgettes and cabbages.<sup>24</sup>

For the critics of *Muzak*, as for those of *Gong*, the idea of a democratic debate was based on clear cultural boundaries concerning both musical taste and cultural capital – the latter regarding the ability of readers in articulating and justifying their arguments. As shown by the following answer, a language judged as lacking sophistication or too aggressive could be easily defined as inappropriate for a ‘specialised’ music magazine. Further, it could be defined as belonging to a different (and lower) kind of popular culture, one made of ‘cheap comic strips’.

I think we should try to talk about music in a musical way [...] especially in a specialised magazine. I would smile at your critiques, if they were not full of sad stereotypes like ‘crazy genius’ (Wyatt), ‘down-to-earth’ (Ratlidge), ‘egocentric’ (Dean), ‘astral follies’ and other observations reminding me of a cheap comic strip. [...] I agree with the rest of the editorial collective about the importance of critiques, but we definitely prefer silence to people who violently attack those who disagree with them. [...] It is evident that while I have listened to Six [Soft Machine’s album], my critics have no idea who Mussorgsky and Scriabin are. Their hate for classical music

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<sup>24</sup> Giancarlo Foresta, Giuseppe Iacono, no title, *Muzak*, n. 5, March 1974, pp. 5-7.

suits their uncritical and non-musical celebration of everything that is contemporary.<sup>25</sup>

As the last sentences show, critics could literally display their cultural capital in order to deconstruct the critiques of readers. In the example below, a critic of *Gong* (Carlo Cella) follows the same strategy while answering a reader who had questioned his expertise about pop-rock music (as he used to write about classical music).<sup>26</sup> While stressing the breadth of his expertise (including both classical and pop-rock music), Cella framed the reader as someone lacking the proper cultural capital to make informed critiques of his articles.

Do you think I am so stupid to talk about music that I do not know? I am interested in all types of music. In fact I listen without any prejudice to Dylan's Highway 61 Revised, Chopin's Preludes [...] Mozart's Jupiter, [Jefferson Airplane's] Pretty As You Feel, John Cage's Interludes, Curved Air's Rainbow, Liszt's Transcendental Studies [...] Woody Guthrie's Stagolee, Art Ensemble of Chicago's Nfamoudou-Boudougou [...]. The problem is that you are a slave of your memories. Feel free to listen to NSU, Little Wing, More Over and the likes until death. But do that behind the walls of your bedroom, with full awareness of your limitations and without pretending to give lessons.<sup>27</sup>

While discussions with readers did not systematically end up in symbolic violence or displays of cultural capital, the monthlies were very clear about the cultural boundaries of the debate. In this respect, letters offering strong critiques of the line

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<sup>25</sup> Giaime Pintor, Answer to Iacono and Foresta, *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Gong* published a regular section about classical music (*Riprendiamoci la classica*) from November 1975 onwards. In order to keep the research design manageable, I decided not to include classical music in the sample of musical features.

<sup>27</sup> Carlo Cella, Answer to Alessandro Capelletti, *Gong*, n. 11 (year 3<sup>rd</sup>), November 1976, pp. 3-4.

of the monthlies provided critics the occasion to specify the nature of such boundaries. In such instances, as shown by the examples discussed, critics stressed the institutional distance between them and readers, that is, they stressed their different position – one denoting cultural expertise – within the field of popular music.

This exploration of the ways in which critics and readers engaged in discussions about taste has shed some light on the role of music magazines as technologies of reflexivity. First of all, magazines were a means through which readers could turn music listening into a meaningful practice or, more specifically, a range of meaningful practices. In this respect, they acted as spaces in which diverse dispositions towards music were discussed and evaluated. However, the ways in which critics evaluated such dispositions show strong field effects. On the one hand, *Ciao 2001* used to encourage a high degree of cultural tolerance towards different tastes and ways of listening. On the other hand, the monthlies encouraged stronger aesthetic distinctions and a markedly *cultured* engagement with both music and music criticism. In this respect, they supported a style of debate that depended on performances of cultural capital. Moreover, although their readers could possess a relatively high cultural capital and musical expertise, critics could still frame their interventions as inappropriate or less accurate than theirs. Put otherwise, critics retained a significant symbolic power over their readers, as well as the power of deciding what letters and topics of discussion deserved publication. The next section shows that music magazines could also act as a means to reflect on the relations between musical practices and social identities, and more generally about youth culture as a space of differences and inequalities.

### 3. Making sense of social differences: youth culture as a space of inequalities

As discussed in the former section, magazines' readers used letters to discuss and evaluate different listening practices, as well as question the choices of critics. However, they used letters also to address what they perceived as social differences shaping youth culture. For example, discussions about ways of listening could easily turn into arguments about the assumed relation (or 'imagined' homology) between certain musical tastes and specific social groups, such as girls and the youngest music fans. Furthermore, readers could use letters to describe their own social experience and to reflect on their position within youth culture. As a result, music magazines enhanced a broader reflection about youth culture as a community shaped by differences and inequalities, rather than only by cultural similarities. This section explores such questions. It starts considering the ways in which critics and readers discussed the relation between taste and the social identity of girls, who were considered by some readers as more likely to display an emotional way of listening and poor musical taste.<sup>28</sup>

#### 3.1 Music and gender

All three magazines published letters from girls expressing feelings of discrimination or addressing the different treatment received by boys and girls in several spheres of Italian social life. However, letters specifically addressing the relation between taste and gender appeared mostly on *Ciao 2001*.<sup>29</sup> The ways in which several readers characterised the cultural choices of girls reveal a mechanism

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<sup>28</sup> Some readers framed the youngest readers and music enthusiasts in the same way, their argument being that they had poor taste and were interested mostly in hard rock and teenybopper bands. I do not address such discussions about music and age for reasons of space, and because they show the same mechanism that emerges in discussions about music and gender.

<sup>29</sup> I focus on this theme (rather than on more general discussions about gender) for both analytical purposes and reasons of space.

of social homology, which lines up taste and social identity. In other words, girls were seen as a social group lacking both interest in serious pop music, and the proper cultural knowledge to appreciate it. While publishing letters that either supported or rejected this view, *Ciao 2001* actively discouraged the association between girls and poor taste. As the following examples show, girls were seen as embodying a very specific musical habitus. One reader, for example, argued that they were interested only in debased Italian light music, and that his female friends did not understand (serious) rock bands such as Pink Floyd, Genesis, Uriah Heep or Italian rock bands like Banco del Mutuo Soccorso.

They told me that this is not music, but sounds made by junkies [*gente drogata*]. Now, I think that those who like the Pooh understand almost nothing [about music] [...] Find me a single girl who is able to start or sustain a serious discussion, or simply a girl who can talk about music. [...] The girls here in Milan are interested only in boyfriends, motorcycles [...] dancing or going to the movies.<sup>30</sup>

Girls were associated with both poor musical taste (Italian light bands like the Pooh) and lack of the appropriate disposition toward music. In this respect, the reader associates a bodily cultural practice (dancing) with girls and puts it in contrast to ‘serious’ discussions of music. A similar view was expressed by two readers arguing that the girls writing to *Ciao 2001* were interested in emotional topics of discussion (e.g. love, friendship) rather than music.

The letters of girls [...] are always about the same things: love, friendship and so on [...]. We would be happy to contradict those saying that girls understand nothing

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<sup>30</sup> Gianpaolo Ranzini, ‘A Milano’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 28, 14 July 1974, pp. 5-6.

about music. But unfortunately we have to agree with them. Everyone knows that the majority of girls love Pooh, Battisti and so on. How is it possible that none of them has ever heard the amazing music of King Crimson, Genesis and Pink Floyd?<sup>31</sup>

In addressing such letters associating commercial and Italian light music with a female audience, *Ciao 2001* followed a distinctive strategy. While maintaining the idea that music requires serious dedication, the magazine displayed the same cultural tolerance analysed above. Rotondi, in this respect, used to discourage the association between girls and lack of musical knowledge, describing the latter as a problem that could affect boys too, especially in a country, like Italy, which was affected by musical ‘ignorance’.

It is correct to pretend accuracy and competence when it comes to discussions about music, but it is not correct to impose your opinions on everyone, boys or girls. [...] musical interests cover a variety of different things. It is undeniable that some of them are more valuable than others, but why does one need to accuse girls for lacking a musical knowledge that could still be developed? Or for tastes that may appear provincial? Taste takes time to evolve, and with some time the ideas that you consider natural will interest almost everyone, including girls. Youth is full of contradictions [...] we are full of different attitudes, sometimes conflicting ones. You need to wait. In the meantime, let's stop making girls the scapegoat of the musical ignorance of our country. A lot of boys and men really scrape the bottom of the barrel with musical issues.<sup>32</sup>

As shown by this answer, the cultural tolerance promoted by the magazine could be

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<sup>31</sup> Marcello and Dulio (no surnames), ‘La musica delle ragazze’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 10, 10 March 1974, pp. 5-6.

<sup>32</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Ranzini, *ibid.*



coupled with a certain degree of social inclusion. As a result, while supporting a *cultural* distinction between two dispositions towards music, *Ciao 2001* did not support a *social* distinction between boys and girls. This approach was by no means less strategic than cultural tolerance. The idea of a youth culture ‘full of contradictions’, in fact, was very much in line with the position of economic leadership held by *Ciao 2001* within the field. In other words, Rotondi did not support social distinctions which could discourage girls from buying the magazine. More generally, the magazine used to reinforce, rather than undermine, an inclusive idea of youth culture.

*Ciao 2001* also published letters from girls defending their cultural choices, like the following one claiming that only a minority of girls were interested in ‘dolls’ or Italian sentimental light music (like the songs of the singer-songwriter Lucio Battisti).

First, it is not true that we are interested only in dolls! Second, perhaps you know just a few girls, and you did not even try to start a true discussion about music with them, you just asked their preferences. Third, have you ever tried to make them listen to Genesis, Pink Floyd and so on? For ‘listening’ I mean empathising with musicians and trying to understand what they express through music. [...] girls do not think only of dolls or Lucio Battisti, there are also girls who love music as much as boys.<sup>33</sup>

However, while both the magazine and some readers could question such assumptions about the cultural identity of girls, the magazine never questioned the idea that a culturally informed way of listening was superior to an emotional one. As shown by the following discussion between Rotondi and a 16 year old girl, the

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<sup>33</sup> Vittoria A., ‘In difesa delle ragazze’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 18, 5 May 1974, pp. 5-7.

defence of girls did not imply a defence of either commercial music or poor musical expertise. In this respect, social inclusion did not lead to an extreme degree of cultural tolerance, which could have undermined the identity of *Ciao 2001* as a magazine committed to the highbrow appreciation of popular music.

Girls listen to music dreaming to meet, one day, the good-looking guy from the Sweet or the 'romantic' Tonino from the Camaleonti [...] Probably they listen to this kind of music because it does not require much intellectual effort to be understood. Clearly, then, they talk only of love and friendship because these are the things they consider important, and they do not talk about music because they do not consider music as a cultural phenomenon but [...] as a means of entertainment [*mezzo di divertimento*].<sup>34</sup>

The truth is that many people, both boys and girls, do not want to make that minimum effort, as you say, to understand a different kind of music. Your letter proves that one must love pop music in order to understand it, and this is not a prerogative of boys. *It is the prerogative of all those who put meaning into their musical choices, with intelligence and a minimum of effort.*<sup>35</sup> [my emphasis]

The emphasis placed both by Rotondi and the reader on the superiority of a certain disposition towards music, and on the superiority of a certain kind of music, shows the limits of the magazine as a means of reflexivity. Put otherwise, while *Ciao 2001* contributed to deconstructing the association between girls and lower popular culture, the hierarchy between different ways of listening showed a much stronger cultural resilience. After all, this distinction informed the logic of the popular music press as a field. The majority of readers and critics had relatively high educational

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<sup>34</sup> Daniela (no surname), 'Donne e concerti', *Ciao 2001*, n. 20, 19 May 1974, pp. 5-7.

<sup>35</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Daniela, *ibid.*

qualifications (as shown in Chapter 5), and even the political engagement of the monthlies was defined on the basis of cultural criteria and aesthetic distinctions (Chapter 6). As a result, the superiority of a *cultured* disposition towards music could not be easily questioned, especially by critics. Indeed, to question the importance of that distinction would have meant questioning the doxa (Bourdieu 1993, 1996) of a relatively young field – one whose social legitimacy critics were trying to sustain.

### *3.2 Class and social privilege*

Readers' reflections about social inequalities assumed a different character than those about taste and social differences. The former, in fact, were not necessarily engendered by discussions about music, but could simply be raised by readers as a critique of their peers. These critiques depicted youth culture as a space of inequalities based on class, gender, geographical location and, more generally, on what readers defined simply as privileges, that is, a sense of inequality that was not articulated through clear-cut (sociological) categories. While addressing these reflections, music critics framed the inequalities shaping youth culture as a serious social problem. However, their answers reveal two different attitudes toward such issues. For the monthlies, the cultural and material privileges of both critics and some readers were *resources* to be devoted to the struggle for equality, as well as to music criticism as a project of cultural change. By contrast, although *Ciao 2001* conceived of inequality as a socio-political problem (that is, one created by political elites), it did not formulate a coherent political project based on class struggle, but used to promote solidarity and a sense of community among readers. In this respect, Rotondi's answers to readers could assume a moral and emotional character that is absent from the approach of the monthlies.

*Ciao 2001* published letters expressing conflicting views on issues of inequality. On the one hand, several readers used the magazine to express feelings of isolation and discrimination, particularly in relation to their peers coming from more privileged backgrounds. On the other hand, some letters openly discriminated against young people with less means, particularly those coming from South Italy. The first case is well exemplified by readers criticising the attitudes of those peers ‘coming from money’ (*figli di papà*).

Those youngsters full of money, they think they can give you the cold shoulder. I would tell them that they are wrong [...] they prefer to set themselves apart rather than stay close to the common people. They know only the nice side of life, and do not know anything about the other side. They do not know what it means to make sacrifices.<sup>36</sup>

While addressing this kind of letters, Rotondi used to criticise any social boundary and form of discrimination that could undermine the symbolic unity of youth culture.

The attitude that you describe is one of the most squalid. In a world in which these differences [*barriere*] no longer matter, this squalid provincialism mixed with snobbery [...] is simply obsolete. We, the youth, live to connect with other people and to listen to what they have to say. Our dignity has nothing to do with those looking down on others.<sup>37</sup>

While such answer frames snobbery as a form of provincialism, and situates such

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<sup>36</sup> Giovanni Schiuma, ‘I figli di papà’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 24, 16 June 1974, pp. 6-7.

<sup>37</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Schiuma, *ibid.*

provincialism *outside* the (cosmopolitan) youth culture, other answers stressed the socio-political dimension of inequality, that is, inequality as a structural problem.

In this city, probably like in any other city, you need to fit into a category. Either you join the 'posh' [ *vestiti sempre alla moda* ] or those 'politically engaged'. But if you cannot afford to be swanky and do not feel like them [...] or if you do not have time for demonstrations and stuff like that, then you are cut off. [...] I cannot keep going like this. Work, home, work. I am tired!<sup>38</sup>

Many young people have the same problems, as young people are the first ones to suffer the alienating effects of social organisation. I believe this can be changed only by transforming this society in depth in order to rediscover a different and more human way of living, working and loving. It is not simple. Nevertheless I think that being engaged is the only way to get out of a situation like yours, which unfortunately is not an exception.<sup>39</sup>

Although defining the alienation of the reader as a social problem to be solved through 'engagement', Rotondi did not advocate for a more specific (and collective) project of social change, thus framing the choice of political engagement as dependent on individual will (see also below). Moreover, the arguments of Rotondi were frequently infused with moral values such as love and solidarity. In the example above, for example, social transformation is praised as long as it can lead to a 'more human way of living, working and loving'. More generally, promoting sentiments of solidarity and community among readers, rather than fostering conflict, was the main strategy of *Ciao 2001*. In some cases, this

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<sup>38</sup> Antonella Chiarello, 'Un mondo fatto di fumo', *Ciao 2001*, n. 21, 30 May 1976, pp. 5-6.

<sup>39</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Chiarello, *ibid.*

could simply mean providing emotional support to those readers feeling ‘inferior’ to their peers coming from more privileged families.

Maybe [I feel this way] because I see people who are totally different from me, ‘well-dressed’ people taking the train from the station of my city [...]. Some time ago, I used to get upset when I saw all these boys and girls with nice dresses and full of themselves. I felt different and inferior, and could only look at my poor dresses thinking that they could not compete with theirs. I also used to think about [the differences between] my house and theirs. I thought of their powerful fathers comfortably sat behind shiny desks, and my father who was somewhere in the city with a dirty coverall.<sup>40</sup>

Dear Silvana, your letter [...] is very indicative of a more widespread feeling. It regards all the young people belonging to [lower] social classes, which are unjustly snubbed by people who think that their wealth is the only thing that matters. [...] I do not know you, your father and your family, but may I tell you that I feel like a friend of yours?<sup>41</sup>

As a media willing to represent the broadest youth audience, *Ciao 2001* could only criticise social discrimination and inequality as forces undermining the symbolic unity of youth culture. However, the magazine also published letters expressing a rather different sentiment, like the following one singling out those who could not afford expensive consumer goods as ‘bumpkins’ (*buzzurri*).

I think these people are really cut off. They are just bumpkins as it does not take much

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<sup>40</sup> Silvana (no surname), ‘Una lettera piena di dignità’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 45, 11 November 1973, pp. 7-8.

<sup>41</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Silvana, *ibid.*

money to buy a pair of Ray-Bans and it is not fundamental to own a Kawasaki. [...] Just stop complaining about how difficult it is to live in North Italy. No one forced you to come here. You could keep breeding cows and making love with them, instead you decided to come here and make yourself known for what you really are: people who live like we used to ten years ago.<sup>42</sup>

Other letters expressed similar racist sentiments towards people from the South (that is from the poorest regions of the country). With such readers, the strategy of the magazine was both to stress the value of cultural tolerance, and the social-structural nature of the differences between North and South Italy.

It does not take much to understand that everyone has the right to dress however he likes, or that everyone has the right to be interested in politics or otherwise. It also does not take much to understand that we are all a product of this society, and if this society failed you, then its fundamental duty is to find a remedy. The ‘Southerners’ [*terroni*] are what they are because that is what some people wanted, not because they have a different blood.<sup>43</sup>

More generally, the magazine acted as a means through which the differences (as well as the prejudices) informing youth culture could find expression and visibility. As a result, some social stereotypes, like those regarding girls and Southern Italians, could be publicly discussed and, to some extent, deconstructed.

*Muzak* and *Gong* also published letters in which readers addressed issues of inequality and discrimination. While the inequalities affecting youth culture were conceived of as a social problem both by the monthlies and *Ciao 2001*, the former

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<sup>42</sup> Un San Babilino, ‘Solo dei buzzurri’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 27, 11 July 1976, pp. 5-6.

<sup>43</sup> Saverio Rotondi, Answer to Un San Babilino, *ibid.*

did not simply promote solidarity among readers, but took a more explicitly political stance about the issue. More specifically, they saw culture, and the cultural privileges of both critics and readers, as a means of class struggle and social change. Readers' reflections about social inequality stemmed mostly from discussions about music and the cultural politics of music criticism (see below). A reader of *Gong*, for example, defined the aesthetic debates encouraged by the magazine as a sign of social privilege in itself.

Just take one of these names [Tim Buckley, Popol Vuh, Ash Ra Temple] and make them listen to an Ecuadorian farmer [*campesinos*], a cowman working in the valley of Susa, or a worker of the Mirafiori factory. They will tell you that this is shit, noise rather than music. [...] It is difficult to keep discussing about what makes music beautiful or ugly when billions of people cannot do that because they have no education, no food, or because they work and have no time for things like music.<sup>44</sup>

While acknowledging that different forms of privilege marked the cultural experience of critics and readers, *Gong* addressed the question by rejecting the social pessimism of the reader and defining a specific form of engagement.

[You say that] we should throw away our minds and ideas just because we are privileged and have time to work on (so-called) alternative projects, while other people are working in factories and have neither time nor the money to do the same. [...] It sounds a bit too much like an imposition, one pleasing that part of society which wants to look Powerful and Immutable. I hope we will not give them a similar satisfaction. There is already someone working hard to remind to the good people that

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<sup>44</sup> Rolly Resegotti, no title, *Gong*, n. 3 (year 2<sup>nd</sup>), March 1975, pp. 3-7.



history is always a history of class struggles.<sup>45</sup>

Being privileged from a cultural and economic point of view, thus, was considered as a *resource* to be used in the struggle for both social equality and the promotion of a better musical culture. As shown by the example above, this perspective was clearly informed by the perception that other groups and social movements were working towards similar aims (see Chapter 6). Active engagement, as a result, was what *Gong* advocated, and the magazine was conceived of by the editorial board as a resource that could be employed in several social contexts in order to enhance people's musical culture.

First of all, since Rolly feels the weight of his money and privileges (which is ok), he might do something. Some cultural associations are looking for books, journals, records and other stuff to be shared with others. They are also looking for people willing to discuss music's possible uses. We hope that our magazine will be used in a similar fashion, perhaps in schools, recreational clubs [*dopolavori*], in certain record shops. We do not like to imagine *Gong* on the private shelves of readers.<sup>46</sup>

*Muzak* similarly argued for the mobilisation of one's own privileges to effect cultural and social change, with the magazine being conceived of as a means to this end. However, as shown in Section 8.2.2, both *Muzak* and *Gong* required a significant degree of *cultural effort* from their readers. The idea of spreading a more informed musical culture was indeed based on the defence of strong aesthetic distinctions. In this respect, critics did not have to *lower* such standards or their language to please the audience, but had to mobilise all their aesthetic skills in

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<sup>45</sup> Francesca Grazzini, Answer to Resegotti, *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Idib.*

order to engage (and enrich) the audience. *Muzak* provided a strong defence of this position while answering the letter from a folk musician (Piero Nissim) who argued that his songs were politically relevant as they were easy to understand by the less privileged.

The chorus said ‘Fanfani, fuck off’,<sup>47</sup> and the people really enjoyed it. They were laughing, singing and clapping their hands. Everyone: children, old day labourers [*braccianti*], women of the working classes. They all looked amused and satisfied because they were hearing from us what they would have expressed by themselves. You know, this is the way the people are. They are easy-going and laugh at swearing or jokes.<sup>48</sup>

For the critics of *Muzak*, this way of engaging ‘the people’ was not acceptable. In fact, they believed that artistically valuable music had political and democratic potential in itself, and that it could enrich the lives of any social group. From this standpoint, the social role of both musicians and critics was defined in a distinctively pedagogic fashion.

You said: ‘this is the way people are. They are easy-going and laugh at swearing or jokes’. It is a slippery statement; it is meant to be ironic but reveals something different. It means to keep the mythical ‘people’ ignorant. They do not have to grow up, thus one can keep feeding them the most debased popular culture [*sottocultura da caserma*], that same sub-culture that the bourgeoisie has imposed on them for centuries. If you think this is the role of the artist, we do not simply disagree, we are

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<sup>47</sup> Nissim's song makes reference to Amintore Fanfani, an Italian Christian Democrat politician.

<sup>48</sup> Piero Nissim, no title, *Muzak*, n. 7 (new series), November 1975, pp. 6-7.

on opposite sides.<sup>49</sup>

This position strongly affected the way in which the monthlies were perceived by some readers. More specifically, it fostered a reflection about the social privileges of critics, the limits of their ambitions, and the social diversity of their audience.

### 3.3 *Criticism and privilege*

As shown by Section 8.2.2, *Muzak* and *Gong* set very specific cultural boundaries around the conversation with readers, asking for a high degree of cultural effort in the form of informed and well-argued critiques. For this reason, some readers perceived the monthlies as excessively demanding, and more generally they criticised them for the use of excessively difficult language and for overly specialist articles. For the following readers, for example, the ideal audience of the magazines was a small avant-garde within the youth culture, rather than ‘the people’.

I always read *Gong* with attention, but 60 per cent of my attention, which is due to the fact that I cannot understand what has been written and why. [...] Feel free to address a restricted number of experts [*addetti ai lavori*] and intellectuals closed in their world. I say it without any irony – just clarify [...] that you are not addressing the masses, the people who need to be helped to understand how they might build a culture for themselves and on the basis of the right popular traditions.<sup>50</sup>

I have the impression that the articles about feminism, abortion and drugs are intended for those comrades [*compagni*] who are already aware and well-informed. In other

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<sup>49</sup> Editorial Board, Answer to Nissim, *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Massimo Padovani, no title, *Gong*, n. 7-8 (Year 3<sup>rd</sup>), July-August 1976, pp. 3-4.

words, the articles take for granted that all comrades are familiar with these discourses, and that they read the articles of *Muzak* as a complement [...] This is why I think that some articles are intended for an avant-garde of readers, an audience that is already familiar with a certain political discourse. But sometimes the majority of the youth [*massa giovanile*] is not familiar with it.<sup>51</sup>

Other readers saw in the skillful language of critics, and in the use of words like ‘masses’, an elitist attitude as well as a misguided cultural privilege.

You tend to talk about the masses [*masse*], but this word suggests detachment, manipulation and contempt. Yes, contempt for the people who do not share your cultural level and that you imagine as brainless and without personality, people who cannot help but following the fads [...] What you are trying to accomplish is nothing more than a power handover: the bourgeois intellectuals replaced by the enlightened comrades who lead the students' avant-garde.<sup>52</sup>

It is worth remembering that the monthlies' readership included at least some working class people, as well as some very young people (Chapter 5). In this respect, some disputes between critics and readers let not just differences in cultural capital and musical taste emerge, but stronger and more explicit social tensions. In the following letter, for example, a working student (*studente lavoratore*) criticises some articles about gender inequalities published by *Muzak*. For the reader, arguments about the political importance of gender were in themselves an indication of privilege. In other words, he saw them as understandable only to people who did not

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<sup>51</sup> Monica (no surname), no title, *Muzak*, n. 9 (new series), January 1976, pp. 6-8.

<sup>52</sup> Antonio Piras, ‘Giornalisti e Popolo’, *Muzak*, n. 10 (new series), February 1976, pp. 6-8.

have to face economic difficulties.

Do you really believe that I, with my cock, have more power than the wife of my boss? She has money, the possibility of enjoying her life, and influence over the life of others. Sex can be about physical strength, but it is not about power. Power is economic, and this can be understood by all those readers who do not go to school and university just for fashion or because their fathers can afford it. I mean those readers who really want to study and have to work and make sacrifices for that, as all the people who need to work in order to earn a decent life.<sup>53</sup>

The publication of these letters clearly show that the monthlies were concerned by such critiques, as they undermined the democratic (and perhaps idealistic) premises of their cultural project. Nevertheless, both *Muzak* and *Gong* defended their position and thus the idea that critics had something to offer to those lacking the same cultural resources.

Sure, sometimes we are 'elitist', sometimes we idealise the average reader rather than addressing the actual one. However, we do a job (which is original, creative and political) and may commit some mistakes, but we never feel contempt. [...] *Contempt, for the masses and individuals, is the feeling of those arguing that we need to deny our culture in the name of a fake communication. However, the problem is not to 'de-culturalise' the intellectuals, but to give to the oppressed the means to make a new culture for themselves.*<sup>54</sup> [my emphasis]

On a similar note, *Gong* reclaimed the importance of the cultural effort of both

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<sup>53</sup> Franco (no surname), 'Proletario? Sì, col cazzo', *Muzak*, n. 12 (new series), April 1976, pp. 6-7.

<sup>54</sup> Giaime Pintor, Answer to Piras, *Muzak*, n. 10 (new series), February 1976, pp. 6-8.

critics and readers in light of broader ambitions of social change.

Gong is not a leaflet and does not mean to follow the litany of slogans, because we know that the reality in which we live requires something more; it is a complex and articulate reality [...]. Our language (which is very different from academic vacuity) is probably confused, but it is confused because it tries to construct something new [...] *[I]t is not possible to express new things through banality and stereotypes. When you are trying to transform the world, you have to transform yourself as well, and this requires effort on the part of writers and their readers as well.*<sup>55</sup> [my emphasis]

#### **4. Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the social function of music magazines focusing on the extent to which they acted as technologies of reflexivity for their audience. More specifically, it has shown that magazines acted as a means through which cultural practices and social differences, as well as the relations between them, could be interpreted and publicly discussed. In this respect, critics explicitly encouraged such a use of the magazines, as they saw the ongoing debate with readers as a practice defining the identity of popular music criticism vis-à-vis other intellectual fields. However, while magazines enhanced significant forms of sociological imagination among readers, critics addressed their opinions with normative intents. More specifically, they mediated readers' letters according to different conceptions of debate and encouraging different cultural practices, such as different ways of listening, different attitudes towards the taste of others, different styles of debate, and different solutions to the inequalities shaping the youth culture.

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<sup>55</sup> Editorial Board, Answer to Padovani, *Gong*, n. 7-8 (Year 3<sup>rd</sup>), July-August 1976, pp. 3-4.

From a theoretical point of view, the chapter has integrated the conceptual tool-kit of Bourdieu's field theory (as revised in Chapter 3) with an attention to forms of tolerance and solidarity, albeit without underestimating the forms of distinction and symbolic violence that shaped the interactions between readers and critics.

Furthermore, although field theory, and more generally Bourdieu's social theory, tend to underestimate social actors' reflexive capacities, I have argued that forms of *regulated reflexivity* represented a key dimension of popular music criticism – one supported through institutionalised and mediated interactions between critics and readers.

Having explored different dimensions of the Italian popular music press, and having analysed the practices and meanings which sustained this field, I now turn to the more general conclusions that we can draw from this case study, especially vis-à-vis the broader questions and debates discussed in the early chapters.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has explored the practices through which Italian critics sustained a new social field and form of cultural evaluation during the 1970s. In doing so, it has shown how critics' national position and social trajectory shaped their understanding of both Anglo-American popular music and their own profession, that is, popular music criticism as a cosmopolitan practice. Focusing on three distinctive practices, such as position-takings, reviewing of different music genres and discussions with readers, the thesis has analysed how broader global changes have shaped popular music criticism as a national cultural field, particularly as regards critics' categories of perception and boundary-work. Furthermore, it has explored the impact of different musics on critics' evaluative practices and the social function of music magazines for Italian youth culture. From a theoretical standpoint, then, the thesis has approached fields as *pragmatic accomplishments* sustained by ongoing labour and public justification, rather than by invisible homologies and uncontested forms of domination. In this last chapter, I summarise the findings of my empirical analysis and clarify the key themes that emerged throughout the previous chapters. I discuss the thesis' original contribution to existing arenas of debate and the possibilities it opens up for future research.

### **Summary of Empirical Analysis**

At the outset of the thesis, I proposed several questions concerning popular music criticism as a social practice. These questions pertained to the social and historical genesis of popular music criticism in Italy; the impact of global and national arrangements on critics' practices; critics' evaluation of non-national musics; and the



reception of music criticism by its audience. The data chapters have addressed these questions moving from a macro to a meso perspective. Chapter 5 argued that the emergence of popular music criticism has been significantly shaped by the expansion of a global recording industry and by the (unequal) structure of the Italian economic miracle and post-war growth. In this respect, it has shown that the popular music press was sustained by a group of young people with (at least) a middle-class background, and who were significantly educated, mostly male, and born in North-Centre Italian cities. By and large, such privileges made it possible to construct popular music criticism as a 'cosmopolitan' field based not simply on generational and aesthetic distinctions, but on the distinction between two different Italies and popular cultures. Indeed, Italian critics sustained a view of the popular shaped by their highbrow disposition. Chapter 6 has further explored how critics' national position informed the way they constructed the popular music press. It has shown that the centrality of political engagement in many sectors of 1970s society made politics a key concern for critics occupying different positions in the field. More specifically, political engagement helped critics in defining music magazines as diverse (and mutually exclusive) projects proposing different strategies of political intervention. The chapter, then, argued that the field's *cultural logic* mediated external pressures towards engagement, as critics redefined political activism according to their own resources and primary role as cultural critics. By and large, both Chapter 5 and 6 dealt with the emergence of the field and the making of positions. By contrast, Chapters 7 and 8 analysed the influence of such positions on more specific practices, namely the evaluation of music and discussions with readers. Chapter 7 explored how critics' position within the field shaped their engagement with different music genres. The chapter has argued that critics did not simply

evaluate music according to highbrow criteria, but were 'moved' by music's emotional impact, cultural history and social imaginary. As a result, the chapter has conceptualised critics' evaluations as the product of an *encounter* between their (embodied) disposition and the properties of different musics. In this respect, critics were never able to impose a completely 'pure gaze' (Bourdieu 1996: 63-64) on popular music genres, but had to engage with the social worlds and histories embodied by different musicians and genres such as rock, jazz and soul. Finally, Chapter 8 has argued that music magazines acted as technologies of reflexivity for their audience, that is, as a means through which readers could discuss both different musical practices (and the dispositions underpinning them) and the social differences shaping Italian youth culture. While this function made it possible to deconstruct some homologies between taste and social identity, and to make the forms of inequality affecting both the music press and Italian society visible, the chapter has shown that magazines' reflexive function had clear limitations. On the one hand, the superiority of a highbrow disposition towards popular music could be hardly 'deconstructed' (particularly by critics), as it sustained the field's symbolic economy. On the other hand, critics addressed the concerns of their readers according to their own agenda. As a result, they included a selection of the topics considered worthy of discussion, and framed readers' reflections and styles of intervention according to normative positions (that is, according to their position within the field).

### **Key themes of the empirical analysis**

A number of different themes underpinned the discussion in the previous chapters. The themes, which I discuss in this section, highlight the different dimensions of criticism as a social practice. However, by extension, they highlight important

dimensions of both cultural production and consumption, such as the structuring power of place and global arrangements; the hierarchical and stratified nature of popular culture; and the role that reflexivity and aesthetic experiences may play in practices of cultural evaluation and distinction.

*The national as a space of cosmopolitan distinction*

The national space has emerged as a key dimension informing critics' practices of distinction and, more generally, the meanings they ascribed both to different musics and their own work. To be sure, Chapter 5 has shown that there is no such a thing as a national identity separate from people's social trajectory. In this respect, the national identity of critics was the product of their history as young and relatively privileged Italians. Their 'experience' of the national, and their experience of Anglo-American popular musics, was not the experience of Italian people at large, nor was it the experience of all members of their audience (as shown in Chapter 8). As a result, while the national space has emerged as structuring new cultural classifications and forms of distinctions, the way it shapes people's dispositions towards popular and national culture (and perhaps politics) is likely to depend – in line with Bourdieu – on their social biography. In this respect, critics' cosmopolitan taste, and their deep knowledge of genres such as rock and jazz, was likely to be a cultural capital only for a distinctive part of the youth culture. This is suggested both by Chapter 8 and by the data on music magazines' audience discussed in Chapter 5. *Ciao 2001*, with sales figures ranging between 60,000 and 80,000 copies per week, had a relatively small audience if compared to the number of young people going through secondary and higher education around the mid-1970s (about two million

and less than one million, respectively).<sup>1</sup> As a result, the cultural experiences (and the experience of the national) explored throughout the data chapters should not be taken as the experience of young Italians at large.

### *Popular culture as a field of struggles*

Critics' hierarchical view of popular music (and culture) is another issue that has emerged from the discussion in the previous chapters. For Italian critics, there were important aesthetic and social differences between rock, jazz and soul; between Italian light music and Italian pop-rock; and sometimes within such genres. For example, Chapter 7 has shown that free jazz could represent the highest degree of aesthetic and political radicalism for some critics. By contrast, hard rock was seen as a dubious musical style for its violent appeal to feelings and lack of aesthetic innovation. By and large, Italian critics (and their audience) drew very *subtle* distinctions within popular culture. Such distinctions, then, were both aesthetic and social, with musical evaluation being frequently an evaluation of the people and social groups (e.g. women, African Americans) producing or consuming music. As discussed in Chapter 2, subcultural and popular music studies have explored the complexity of popular music cultures in great detail. However, they have privileged in-depth explorations of given music cultures (e.g. rock, punk and so on) rather than cultural research comparing different genres. Moreover, they have privileged the shared views and experiences of participants, rather than the institutional and social differences shaping music cultures (Hesmondhalgh 2005). By contrast, Chapter 1 has also shown that sociology has been concerned mostly with the consecration or semi-legitimation (Regev 1994) of the popular, thus paying less attention to the diversity

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<sup>1</sup> I am drawing on the data discussed in Chapter 5. This rough approximation remains true even if one considers that a single magazine could be read by more than one reader; as suggested by critics themselves. See Rotondi, 'Cari lettori e cari amici', *Ciao 2001*, n. 48, 2 December 1973, p. 5.

of popular culture and its institutions (and to popular culture as a field of struggle). Drawing on Bourdieu, I have tried to accomplish, to some extent, an integration of such traditions. On the one hand, I have analysed the institutional and social differences shaping popular music criticism, thus adopting a sociological perspective that is underappreciated in cultural studies (at least as regards the fields reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2). On the other hand, I have focused on meaning-making practices that sociological approaches to criticism have not yet been able to grasp in their complexity. As discussed in Chapter 1, the sociology of culture (as well as cultural sociology) have underestimated the generic and intra-generic differences shaping critics' understandings of popular music and culture. Moreover, criticism has been approached more as an institution of consecration than as a diversified field of struggles – one animated by different organisations and audiences. As I shall argue in the last section, this conceptualisation has broader implications for the study of cultural and media expertise, as it may be extremely helpful in studying the ways in which new media and digital technologies are transforming criticism as a social practice and form of labour.

#### *Reflexivity, classifications and distinctions*

Adopting a field perspective on cultural classifications and practices of social distinction, the thesis has shown that popular music criticism was a field in which such forms of boundary-work were subject to discussion, justification and questioning. The relative dynamism of this process has emerged in several instances. While Chapters 5 and 6 have shown that the symbolic boundaries of the field had to be actively constructed and justified in relation to a variety of other fields and institutions, Chapters 6 and 7 have shown that strong institutional changes, such as

*Ciao 2001*'s choice to cover disco music and the monthlies' political turn, had to be justified vis-à-vis the concerns of readers. Chapter 8, then, has shown that dispositions towards music, as well as social differences among audience members, were subject to ongoing discussion between critics and readers. Finally, Chapter 7 has shown that music critics were able to integrate a (limited) understanding of gender inequalities in their reviews from 1975 onwards, thus turning gender inequality into an issue of public discussion. However, the thesis has shown also that the reflexivity of critics and readers had some limitations. For example, critics never questioned the superiority of a highbrow disposition towards popular music; despite the fact that some readers could refuse this disposition and praise a more 'passionate' engagement with music. Similarly, a consideration of women's disadvantaged position within the musical field did not prevent critics from treating women as a 'genre' in themselves, and did not transform (if not to a limited extent) the gendered structure of the field. These examples show that some cultural and social boundaries were more resilient than others, as they could not be easily questioned or changed. However, it would be wrong to conclude that the field did not enhance some forms of reflexivity, which made 1970s music magazines an important cultural resource for their readers. In order to avoid a normative opposition between reflexivity and 'illusio',<sup>2</sup> the thesis has treated reflexivity as an empirical question, exploring both the practices through which it was exerted and their limitations.

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<sup>2</sup> Several critics of Bourdieu's work see concepts such as *illusio* and *doxa* – and Bourdieu's *habitus* – as a negation of social actors' reflexivity (e.g. Elder-Vass 2007, Sayer 2010, Boltanski 2011). Although a discussion of this position is beyond scope, one could argue that emotional and intellectual investments in a certain field of practice – that is, the way *illusio* emerges from Bourdieu's major field study (1996) – are not necessarily devoid of reflexivity. For a less normative view on *habitus* and reflexivity, see Bottero (2010).

### *Cultural reception as a relational experience*

The thesis has focused on the distinctive qualities that critics ascribed to different musics. In line with recent tendencies in music and cultural sociology (DeNora 2000, Hennion 2008, Alexander 2011), it has explored the power of music on Italian critics, and why some musics ‘mattered’ to them. Conceiving of culture as a relatively autonomous force has been a substantially post- (if not anti-) Bourdieusian strategy in recent cultural research (see Born 2010). However, I have argued that a consideration of aesthetic experiences and, more specifically, music as a moving experience (Frith 1998) is not in contradiction with Bourdieu's relational epistemology. As a result, in Chapter 7 I have approached music as part of a *social encounter*, which includes both aesthetic artifacts and human actors endowed with specific socio-historical properties. To be sure, I do not find it useful to theorise music as a purely sonic force. In this respect, I have recovered DeNora's interest in music's cultural and historical connotations (2002), and Hennion's interest in music's technological mediations (1997), in order to conceptualise music as a complex and highly mediated cultural form. Such complexity emerges clearly in the discussion in Chapter 7. Italian critics did not simply discuss music's sonic features, but musicians, their bodies, the cultural traditions (i.e. genres) they were seen to represent, and the places (e.g. American society) whose contradictions they seemed to embody. In other words, genres like rock, jazz and soul represented broader social worlds for Italian critics. Such worlds and cultural traditions elicited distinctive discourses and attachments, and – in the case of 1960s rock – had shaped critics' musical habitus. It would be difficult, then, to deny music an autonomous role in the genesis of Italian popular music criticism; and the distinctive meanings that critics attached to different genres similarly indicate that music was not an inert object onto which they could

project their highbrow disposition. Nevertheless, I have shown that critics' social biography and institutional affiliation mattered as well. In this respect, monthlies' investment in the political and aesthetic radicalism of free jazz was shaped by their (similarly radical) position within the music press. Similarly, *Ciao 2001*'s openness towards disco music was shaped by the magazine's heteronomous strategy: if the youth culture was enjoying disco, then the magazine – as an inclusive representative of Italian youth – had to cover it. As a result, the thesis has argued that the power of music, and its effects on social actors, can be fruitfully studied, taking into account social and institutional differences that more 'culturalist' (and anti-Bourdieuian) cultural sociologies have too easily discounted.

### **Contribution to Knowledge**

The thesis' findings, as well as its methodological and theoretical approach, provide an original contribution to the study of media critics and music cultures, and to the development of field theory as a methodology for cultural sociology and cultural studies. Moreover, the thesis contributes to more general debates about cultural production and consumption, and about the impact of national differences and globalisation on both.

### *Cultural Criticism*

Drawing on Bourdieu (1993, 1996), the thesis contributes to the emerging sociology of criticism (as reviewed in Chapter 1), by theorising cultural expertise as a field of struggles and exploring the different practices through which critics sustain this field. In comparison to the notion of criticism as an institution of posthumous consecration (Allen and Lincoln 2004), the thesis approaches criticism as a practice



demanding ongoing labour and justification. Furthermore, the field perspective adopted by the research makes it possible to focus on the strategies and discourses supported by different organisations, and on the ways in which they define their identity in relation to other institutions and fields. The thesis, then, proposes an approach that avoids focusing either on discourses or institutional constraints, thus defining an alternative to the epistemological oppositions shaping the existing literature (which are due to disciplinary differences between the sociology of culture, cultural sociology and cultural studies). Overall, the thesis provides a significantly more nuanced picture of critics' practices of evaluation and pays more attention to the institutional diversity of criticism within popular music and culture.

### *Music Studies*

The thesis has focused on what is distinctive about *music* criticism. Drawing on DeNora (2000) and others (Frith 1998, Hennion 2008, Born 2005), it has explored the aesthetic power of different musics on Italian critics. Conversely, it has taken into account the habitus and social biography of critics in order to explore how such properties intervene in the production of music's meaning. Focusing on the evaluation of popular music, I have theorised cultural reception as a *social encounter* between actors and aesthetic objects endowed with distinct (and distinctive) properties. As a result, in contrast to approaches that emphasise music's autonomy, the thesis pays significantly more attention to the social trajectory and institutional role of listeners, as well as to the socio-historical differences between popular music genres. Further, the thesis has proposed a *critical* perspective on musical practices that stresses the role of music in processes of social change *and* reproduction. As a result, it has bridged two different traditions within music studies: on the one hand,

theories of music's autonomy and aesthetic power; on the other hand, studies addressing music as a means of social distinction (see Chapter 2). The thesis has shown that while the introduction of Anglo-American popular music in Italy (particularly 1960s rock) enhanced an important social change – the emergence of popular music criticism and a ‘cosmopolitan critique’ of Italian institutions – only a privileged fraction of Italian youth was likely to participate in such change as cultural producer. By and large, then, the thesis has proposed a critical perspective on the role of aesthetic experiences in social action. Such experiences, indeed, do not necessarily lead to social transformation, but may foster the construction of boundaries and contribute to the (unconscious) reproduction of existing inequalities.

### *Field Theory*

While drawing extensively on Bourdieu's notions of field and practice, the thesis has revised such theoretical tools and explored some issues that are rarely addressed by field studies and Bourdieu's own work. First of all, it has theorised criticism as *a field in itself*, which is relatively autonomous from the fields of production and consumption. This field, as shown by the data chapters, can be internally diversified and animated by wars of position. Second, drawing on post-Bourdieuian cultural theory and recent field studies, the thesis has approached cultural fields as pragmatic accomplishments based on different practices, ongoing labour and justification. In this respect, it has adopted a meso-level perspective on popular music criticism, focusing on the practices, narratives and identities of critics, albeit without underestimating broader issues of political economy and socio-historical change. The thesis' focus on practices, then, has enhanced the exploration of three dimensions of popular music criticism, such as the way in which critics' national position (and

Italy's position within a global recording industry) shaped the field's stakes and symbolic boundaries; the impact of aesthetic fascinations on the habitus and evaluative practices of critics; and the reflexive practices enhanced (as well as prevented) within the field. While such issues have emerged as relevant to understand the role of popular music criticism in 1970s Italy, they can be studied in relation to other fields of practices and, therefore, as general properties of cultural fields.

### *Methodological contribution*

The thesis has defined a methodological framework combining a thick description of critics' evaluative discourses with the social history of the actors of the music press. In contrast to the studies of criticism reviewed in Chapter 1, the thesis has explored the broader field of relationships shaping critics' practices, thus combining the focus of sociological approaches to institutional constraints with the rich descriptions provided by cultural studies. Similarly, in relation to music studies (as reviewed in Chapter 2), the thesis has integrated the rich descriptions of popular music and subcultural studies with a stronger attention to both the historical genesis of music cultures, and the institutional and social differences shaping them. As discussed in Chapter 4, then, the thesis has defined an innovative approach to the use of magazines as primary data. Rather than treating magazines simply as media texts, it has studied the socio-historical genesis of the organisations which sustained such 'new' media, and has explored the diversity of editorial practices performed by critics. More generally, the thesis has proposed a *relational* and *inductive* approach to the study of cultural evaluation that reconstructs the ways critics themselves defined (and redefined) symbolic and social boundaries vis-à-vis other fields,

institutions and practices. Such an approach, in line with Bourdieu, is also *genealogical*, as it looks at the historical genesis of institutions, practices and categories of evaluation.

### *Cultural production*

This thesis has focused on a field of practice that is distinct from (albeit connected to) production and consumption. However, the issues discussed throughout the previous chapters are relevant also for empirical research on such practices. As regards cultural production, the thesis has analysed how the emergence of a global recording industry based on American and British exports did shape the popular music press as a national field. On the one hand, this was a key condition of possibility for the emergence of the field; on the other hand, it shaped the meanings that critics ascribed to their own practices and, more generally, the field's stakes. Other cultural fields are likely to be similarly affected by global changes, transnational arrangements and networks, and global distribution of resources. Likewise, national and local spaces are likely to shape the symbolic and material economy of other cultural fields. These are lines of research that sociologists of culture have started exploring only recently (see Dowd and Janssen 2011), and to which the thesis contributes with new empirical findings and an original theoretical framework.

Questions of aesthetic pleasure and cultural fascination are similarly relevant for production studies. As shown by Banks (2012), a focus on pleasure and internal rewards may explain why people invest their time, passion and resources into certain spaces of practice, and – as shown also by recent research on cultural labour (Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2010) – why they might be inclined to accept low wages,

casualisation and precariousness as normal working conditions. Although the thesis has not addressed the question of criticism as labour, it has contributed to the study of cultural production exploring the fascination of critics for several non-Italian musics, thus showing why such musics mattered to them. As a result, the thesis has integrated Bourdieu's attention to the dynamics of competition and social distinction with a focus on the commitments that made such practices possible as well as meaningful.

Thirdly, the thesis has contributed to the study of cultural production exploring the possibilities and limits for reflexivity within a specific field. It is unlikely that all forms of production offer producers and audiences the same opportunities to reflect on broader social arrangements or on their own social position. In this respect, the mechanism through which Italian critics and readers could 'reflect' on their cultural practices and social differences is historically specific and peculiar. It was enhanced by strong social differences between critics and some readers, and by an institutionalised (and highly mediated) form of public discussion. Other cultural fields are based on different technologies, practices and institutional routines. As a result, the extent to which cultural producers may reflect on (or even challenge) broader social arrangements is an empirical and field-specific question – one that should take into account forms of symbolic violence and domination (in line with Bourdieu), but without underestimating existing forms of sociological imagination and activism (Banks 2007).

### *Cultural consumption*

Although it focuses on critics, and on a very specific (and public) form of consumption, the thesis has provided important insights into the way in which

people's national position shapes the meanings they ascribe to both national and 'foreign' cultural commodities. Moreover, it has shown that consumers' national position is entwined with their social background and trajectory. In this respect, Italian critics expressed a socially specific *perspective* on their national culture that fuelled outspoken forms of distinction between, to some extent, two different Italies. From this standpoint, the thesis' findings have expanded recent research showing that national boundaries may shape the meanings that people ascribe to cultural commodities (Regev 2007, Purhonen and Wright 2013, Prieur and Savage 2013). However, focusing on evaluative discourses, the thesis has provided a more nuanced picture about why certain musics mattered to Italian critics, and about how critics used to justify emerging cultural classifications and forms of distinction. In line with recent quantitative and mixed-methods studies focusing on people's likes and dislikes (e.g. Savage and Gayo 2012), the thesis argues for the importance of a relational perspective on consumption practices. Indeed, it is in relation to a whole cultural space that Italian critics defined the meaning and value of American and British popular musics. However, in comparison to such studies, the thesis has provided a socio-historical account of 'emerging forms of cultural capital' (Prieur and Savage 2013), focusing on the institutions and practices which supported such capitals through ongoing labour. Moreover, it has explored the *cultural frames* through which a new form of cultural capital (expertise in popular music) was publicly legitimated, and has shown that musical likes and dislikes may be fuelled by aesthetic fascinations about other places, traditions and people (as in the case of African American jazz musicians).

Finally, the thesis has shown that cultural capital does not always work as a means of uncontested domination (Lamont and Lareau 1988). As shown by Chapter 8, people

may refuse cultural logics that they experience as alien to their dispositions and habits, and may justify their choices through articulate explanations.<sup>3</sup> In this respect, the thesis has shown that Italian critics, as consumers occupying a ‘dominant’ position in terms of cultural and economic capital (Atkinson 2011), needed to justify and defend their cultural choices, especially as they were relatively new and, therefore, only a *potential* form of capital. In this respect, the thesis has provided considerable detail about the contested nature of (symbolic) capitals, whose value depends on ongoing labour but also on field-specific recognition and broader forms of social recognition – the latter being a kind of legitimation that Italian critics, during the 1970s, were unlikely to possess.<sup>4</sup>

### **Further Research**

So far I have summarised the thesis' findings and discussed its original contributions to different arenas of debate. Here I conclude by pointing to some possible directions for future research. Although addressing a historically specific case study, the thesis has approached cultural criticism as a field of struggle animated by competing groups and diversity of practices. This conceptualisation may be extremely helpful to enquire about contemporary forms of media expertise, and more specifically about the extent to which new media have transformed the practices of critics, their standards of evaluation and the organisations for which they work. In this respect, a field perspective may reveal struggles between different generations of critics, between emergent and more established technologies or editorial formats, but also struggles over new evaluative criteria and working conditions. For example, the

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<sup>3</sup> Although the very possibility of such explanations may still depend on readers' cultural capital. For an opposing view on people's critical capacities, see Boltanski and Thévenot (2006).

<sup>4</sup> Italian critics complained about such a lack of recognition in several occasions, see Maria Laura Giulietti, ‘Allora, esiste la cultura rock?’, *Ciao 2001*, n. 45, 16 November 1975, p. 17; Franco Bolelli, ‘Sulla politica dei raduni estivi. Le polveri bagnate’, *Gong*, n. 10, 1976, pp. 8-10.

approach defined so far might be employed to study the extent to which the forms of unpaid or ‘free’ labour fostered by new media have become an object of contestation among critics and, more generally, among cultural workers. Put otherwise, one may ask if new media has significantly changed the working conditions of critics (and other cultural workers) and the extent to which such changes are an object of struggle. Keeping such transformations in mind, a further line of research may tackle the role of critics (and other evaluative institutions and technologies) within contemporary music cultures. As discussed in Chapter 2, research on music cultures has underappreciated the social and institutional differences shaping them. In this respect, there is still scant research on the way different music cultures – such as hip hop, indie-rock and electronic music – sustain different criteria of evaluation and forms of capital. Moreover, it is still not clear if (and under what conditions) such capitals are recognised as valuable in other cultural and social fields. In other words, we still do not know very much about how new (or emerging) forms of capital are converted and used (that is, what privileges they sustain, for whom and in what contexts).

A major theme of this thesis has been the relationship between popular culture, new practices of distinction and people's national position. The relationship between consumption and people's national identity may be further explored looking at contemporary forms of transnational mobility. In this respect, one may study the ways in which mobility impacts on one's relationship with both national and non-national culture; and – by corollary – how engagement with culture shapes the experience of mobility itself. On a similar note, one may study how pre-existing categories of perception grounded in people's *national habitus* impact on their experiences of a new social and cultural context. This issue provides further ground



to expand Bourdieu's limited view of reflexivity, aesthetic experiences and social trajectories (the latter being conceptualised mostly as 'national' in his work). As with the research lines already discussed, this one may similarly demand a consideration of people's uses of digital technologies and new media.

Finally, the impact of globalisation on cultural fields can be explored in relation to sectors other than criticism. The thesis has explored this question by looking at producers' habitus, identity and meaning-making practices, but also to the broader institutional changes related to the import of Anglo-American music genres in Italy. While such issues are worth exploring for other cultural fields, global forces – in combination with digital technologies and new media – may shape cultural production in ways that, for the most part, remain to be explored.

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## **Websites**

<http://stampamusicale.altervista.org/>

## Appendices

### **Appendix A: Biographical Sources**

Biographical data about Italian music critics have been collected from the following sources:

1) **Saverio Rotondi** (*Ciao 2001*, editor-in-chief, co-owner)

- [http://digilander.libero.it/ciao.2001/mat\\_r\\_saverio\\_rotondi.htm](http://digilander.libero.it/ciao.2001/mat_r_saverio_rotondi.htm) (last access 25/10/13)

2) **Maria Laura Giulietti** (*Ciao 2001*)

- <http://www.musicultura.it/archivio/persona/marialaura-giulietti/> (last access 25/10/13)
- [http://rizzoli.rcslibri.corriere.it/autore/giulietti\\_maria\\_laura.html](http://rizzoli.rcslibri.corriere.it/autore/giulietti_maria_laura.html) (last access 25/10/13)

3) **Fiorella Gentile** (*Ciao 2001*)

- [http://www.e-journal.it/special\\_event/cv\\_gentile\\_fiorella.htm](http://www.e-journal.it/special_event/cv_gentile_fiorella.htm) (last access 25/10/13)
- [http://www.profesnet.it/vario/9909/4donne\\_gentile.htm](http://www.profesnet.it/vario/9909/4donne_gentile.htm) (last access 25/10/13)

4) **Enzo Caffarelli** (*Ciao 2001*; *Muzak*)

- <http://www.anci.it/Contenuti/Allegati/biografia%20Caffarelli.docx> (last access 25/10/13)
- <http://it.paperblog.com/maurizio-baiata-724860/> (last access 25/10/13)

5) **Maurizio Baiata** (*Ciao 2001*; *Muzak*)

- <http://mauriziobaiata.net/about-me/> (last access 25/10/13)
- <http://it.paperblog.com/maurizio-baiata-724860/> (last access 25/10/13)
- Baiata, M. 2012. Gli alieni mi hanno salvato la vita. Baiso: Verdechiaro.

6) **Armando Gallo** (*Ciao 2001*)

- <http://www.movimentiprogram.net/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=viewarticle&artid=507&page=1> (last access 25/10/13)
- <http://athosenrile.blogspot.it/search/label/Armando%20Gallo> (last access 25/10/13)

7) **Mariù Safier** (*Ciao 2001*)

- [http://www.radio.rai.it/grparlamento/voltiGr.cfm?Q\\_PERS\\_ID=642&EC=1&first=1](http://www.radio.rai.it/grparlamento/voltiGr.cfm?Q_PERS_ID=642&EC=1&first=1) (last access 25/10/13)

8) **Dario Salvatori** (*Ciao 2001*)

- [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dario\\_Salvatori](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dario_Salvatori) (last access 25/10/13)
- <http://www.musicalnews.com/articolo.php?codice=32&sz=1> (last access 25/10/13)

9) **Daniele Caroli** (*Ciao 2001*)

- <http://www.bobmarleymagazine.com/2002/10/intervista-a-daniele-carioli/> (last access 25/10/13)
- Casiraghi, G. 2005. *Anni Settanta: generazione rock*. Roma: Editori Riuniti.

10) **Giorgio Riviaccio** (*Ciao 2001*)

- [http://www.premiocapodorlando.it/dettaglio\\_premiato.php?premiato=dott.%20gior%20riviaccio&id\\_premiato=46](http://www.premiocapodorlando.it/dettaglio_premiato.php?premiato=dott.%20gior%20riviaccio&id_premiato=46) (last access 25/10/13)
- <http://www.primaonline.it/2009/03/12/69531/direttore-di-%E2%80%98storica-national-geographic%E2%80%99/> (last access 25/10/13)

11) **Franco Montini** (*Ciao 2001*)

- <http://schermiblog.blogspot.it/2012/10/scrivere-di-cinema3-franco-montini.html> (last access 25/10/13)
- [http://www.key4biz.it/Players/Who\\_is\\_who/M/Montini\\_Franco\\_193631.html](http://www.key4biz.it/Players/Who_is_who/M/Montini_Franco_193631.html) (last access 25/10/13)

12) **Enrico Gregori** (*Ciao 2001*)

- <http://www.ilfurtodellaluna.it/enrico-gregori-quando-il-cielo-era-sempre-piu-blu/> (last access 25/10/ 2013)

13) **Michael Pergolani** (*Ciao 2001*)

- <http://www.hatfootwear.com/hat-personaggi/index.php?idart=314> (last access 25/10/2013)
- <http://www.piazza.it/cercaViewer.asp?tabella=oggetti&ID=1474> (last access 25/10/2013)
- [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael\\_Pergolani](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Pergolani) (last access 25/10/2013)

14) **Renato Marengo** (*Ciao 2001*)

- <http://www.radio.rai.it/radio1/demo/marengo.cfm> (last access 25/10/2013)

15) **Michael Insolera** (*Ciao 2001*; *Muzak*)

- [http://edizionimediterranee.it/index.php?page=shop.product\\_details&flypage=flypage.tpl&product\\_id=759&category\\_id=32&option=com\\_virtuemart&Itemid=60](http://edizionimediterranee.it/index.php?page=shop.product_details&flypage=flypage.tpl&product_id=759&category_id=32&option=com_virtuemart&Itemid=60) (last access 25/10/2013).

16) **Giaime Pintor** (*Muzak*, editor-in-chief)

- [http://archivistorico.corriere.it/1997/novembre/11/morto\\_Giaime\\_Pintor\\_scrive\\_Porci\\_co\\_0\\_9711115133.shtml](http://archivistorico.corriere.it/1997/novembre/11/morto_Giaime_Pintor_scrive_Porci_co_0_9711115133.shtml) (last access 25/10/2013)
- <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1997/11/11/morto-giaime-pintor-fondo-muzak.html> (last access 25/10/2013)
- [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giaime\\_Pintor\\_%28giornalista%29](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giaime_Pintor_%28giornalista%29) (last access 25/10/2013)

17) **Lidia Ravera** (*Muzak*, co-editor)

- <http://www.lastampa.it/Torino/cmsSezioni/cronaca/200801articoli/5663girata.asp> (last access 25/10/2013)
- [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lidia\\_Ravera](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lidia_Ravera) (last access 25/10/2013)

18) **Simone Dessì** (*Muzak*; real name: Luigi Manconi)

- [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luigi\\_Manconi](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luigi_Manconi) (last access 25/10/2013)
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19) **Marco Lombardo Radice** (*Muzak*)

- <http://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/1989/07/18/da-porci-con-le-ali-all-impegno.html> (last access 25/10/2013)
- [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marco\\_Lombardo\\_Radice](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marco_Lombardo_Radice) (last access 25/10/2013)

20) **Alessandro Portelli** (*Muzak*)

- [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alessandro\\_Portelli](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alessandro_Portelli) (last access 25/10/2013)
- <http://www.circologiannibosio.it/archivio/risultatisemplicefondo.php?stringa=Politica&fondo=Alessandro%20Portelli> (last access 25/10/2013)

21) **Gino Castaldo** (*Muzak*)

- [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gino\\_Castaldo](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gino_Castaldo) (last access 25/10/2013)
- <http://mauriziobaiata.net/2012/01/18/il-rock-non-e-musica-da-consumare-considerazioni-sullarticolo-di-gino-castaldo/> (last access 25/10/2013)

22) **Bruno Mariani** (*Muzak*)

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## **Appendix B: Thematic Analysis - Codebook**

### **Chapter 7**

#### **Originality of the musician and/or the musical work**

Features highlight the originality and innovation of songs, albums and/or careers vis-à-vis a broader historical and cultural context.

Critics use words such as new, original, avant-garde, innovative, creative, challenging.

Features highlight the 'lack' of highbrow qualities in music through negative qualifications (such as unoriginal, uninspired, repetitive, old).

#### **Market constraints**

Music's purely economic value (e.g. 'commercial music') is negatively framed; creativity and artistic research are framed as the opposite of 'commercialisation'.

Market institutions, such as the music industry and advertising companies, are framed as a negative influence over musicians' creative choices.

#### **Music's pleasure and emotional force**

Features describe and evaluate music's emotional and bodily qualities, and more generally music's effects on listeners.

Features employ adjectives like intense, moving, engaging, shocking, poignant, touching.

### **Chapter 8**

#### **Cultural politics of the magazines**

Letters discuss music magazines' editorial line and/or identity; they discuss their cultural and political choices, and their relationship with advertisers, the music industry and political groups.

#### **Music**

Letters discuss broader musical trends and/or musicians' careers, and aesthetic and social differences between music genres.

Letters discuss the politics of institutions such as RAI, Sanremo, other media (e.g.

radio) and live concerts.

### **Music and politics**

Letters discuss the relationship between music and politics, focusing on specific examples (e.g. the political position of bands and musicians) or addressing the question in its generality.

### **Music and sexuality/gender**

Letters discuss musical taste and ways of listening in relation to gender differences; they discuss differences between the taste of boys and girls.

### **Music and age**

Letters discuss the relationship between musical taste and age; they address differences between the taste of younger and older readers, and between the taste of readers and their parents.

### **Politics and society**

Letters discuss political and social issues, such as the education system, the military service, Italy's economic crisis, and the line of political parties and groups.

### **Social differences and inequality**

Readers discuss social differences and inequalities shaping Italian society, the youth culture and/or the music press.

I have classified these differences according to the following sub-themes: class/social privilege, sexuality/gender, city/periphery, North/South.

The code sexuality/gender also includes discussions about feminism and the Feminist movement.

Letters discussing disability (1) and education (1) have been classified as 'other'.

### **Friendship**

Letters discuss issues such as loneliness, fights between friends, friends' emotional support and friendship as a moral value.



**Relationships with parents**

Letters discuss readers' relationships with their parents, mostly addressing misunderstandings, fights and (more generally) difficult relationships.

**Love**

Letters discuss flirts, infatuations and love as a sentiment and/or moral value.

**Religious beliefs**

Letters discuss the readers' religious beliefs or doubts and religious institutions (such as the Catholic church).

**Elitism/difficult language**

Letters discuss the 'elitist' cultural politics of *Muzak* and *Gong*; they mostly focus on the monthlies' difficult contents or language.

Two letters published in *Ciao 2001* similarly complained for the magazine's difficult language. However, they have been not coded as 'elitism/difficult language' because they do not accuse the magazine of elitism, nor do they question its cultural politics.

### Appendix C: Music coverage and gender (1973-1977)

	Bands	Men	Women
<b>Oct. 1973 - Aug. 1974</b>			
<i>Ciao 2001</i>	182	200	20
<i>Muzak</i>	33	36	1
<b>Sept. 1974 - July 1975</b>			
<i>Ciao 2001</i> (gap year)			
<i>Muzak</i> <sup>1</sup>	18	21	4
<i>Gong</i>	31	48	3
<b>Aug. 1975 - June 1976</b>			
<i>Ciao 2001</i>	167	239	43
<i>Muzak</i> <sup>2</sup>	34	41	5
<i>Gong</i>	28	47	4
<b>July 1976 - June. 1977</b>			
<i>Ciao 2001</i>	159	127	27
<i>Muzak</i> (no longer in activity)			
<i>Gong</i> <sup>3</sup>	16	39	5

As argued in Chapter 7, the coverage of Italian music magazines was skewed towards male musicians during the years under study. Being a weekly publication, and covering a broader variety of genres, *Ciao 2001* gave significantly more space to female musicians. Nevertheless, all magazines contributed to reproducing a substantial asymmetry between men and women musicians, both applying different interpretative frames (as showed in Chapter 7), and giving less visibility to women.

<sup>1</sup> Due to a change of ownership, *Muzak* published only 6 issues during these months.

<sup>2</sup> *Muzak* ceased publication in May 1975.

<sup>3</sup> The sample includes the issues of July/August, September and October, that is, the last ones published by *Gong*'s original editorial board.

I analysed the coverage of music magazines making a content analysis of their tables of contents. The analysis is based on all the issues published during the years under study with the exception of a ‘gap year’ for *Ciao 2001* (which is due to sampling choices discussed in Chapter 4). The table's division between three time frames reflects these sampling choices as well as the magazines' different editorial histories. As with Chapter 7, the analysis is based on feature articles, and as such does not include reviews and other short musical pieces (such as live reports). As argued in Chapter 4, features indicate stronger choices of coverage, as they are the editorial format that gives strongest visibility to musicians. Moreover, an analysis including reviews and shorter musical pieces as indicators of gender inequality would produce very similar results, as magazines' review sections were similarly skewed towards men.

The code ‘women’ includes also all-female bands (such as Labelle), and thematic articles about women musicians (e.g. ‘women in rock music’). The analysis excludes articles about entire music trends, position-takings, and articles about extra-musical issues. A full list of coding rules is available on request.